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By Mrs. Harriet Lewis.

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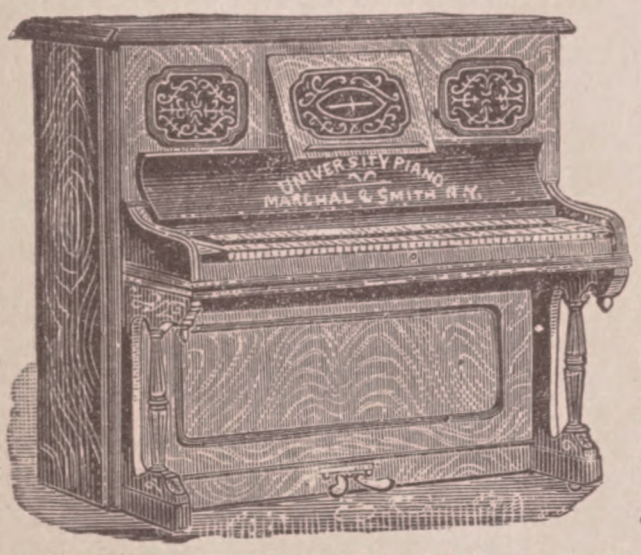
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BERYL'S HUSBAND.

BERYL'S HUSBAND

A NOVEL.

BY

MRS. HARRIET LEWIS.

WITH CHOICE ILLUSTRATIONS BY G. A. TRAVER.

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BERYL'S HUSBAND.

CHAPTER I.

IN FAR GENEVA.

THE express steamer *Bonivard* was making her way swiftly from Villeneuve to Geneva upon Lake Leman, in Switzerland, one bright June morning, several years ago. She had more than her usual complement of passengers, who varied in scarcely a single respect from the types ordinarily seen upon her decks. Among them was a group of young ladies who had embarked at Vevay, and were on an excursion to Geneva under convoy of a spectacled, elderly gentleman, and three prim, Argus-eyed governesses of mature age and vinegary aspect.

These young ladies, twenty in number, of ages between eight and eighteen years, and all of English birth or parentage, were members of the long-established English family-school at Vevay, known as the Pension de Bassett, the principal of which was the Reverend Edward Bassett, a retired English curate, and the elderly, spectacled gentleman before mentioned.

The young charges of Mr. Bassett were kept apart from the remainder of the passengers, being penned in a corner by themselves, and watched over by their governesses, who acted the part of sheep-dogs with commendable vigilance. The young ladies were, for the most part, demure and exceedingly quiet, having glances only for the scenery, or the picturesque boats with lateen-sails they frequently encountered. With one exception, they were ordinary, commonplace girls.

The exception stood a little apart from her fellows, leaning lightly against the taffrail, her eyes fixed in a rapt gaze upon Mont Blanc, which, afar in the blue distance, towered a snow-covered king above his subject mountains. She was murmuring Byron's description of Mont Blanc in a low, hushed voice, scarcely above a whisper.

Compared with her school-fellows, this girl was as a diamond among pebbles. Not yet seventeen years of age, she was slender, graceful and as supple as a young panther. She was strikingly beautiful, after a picturesque and unusual fashion. She had a fair and pale complexion; great, vivid brown eyes, like glowing lamps; straight and slender eyebrows brown as her eyes, and hair of a reddish tint—the warm, deep red the old painters loved to depict. The face indicated a warm, passionate nature, quick to love and quick to hate, a

nature with many faults, perhaps, but truthful, honest and generous to the core. This girl was Beryl Star.

She was English by birth and parentage. She had been an inmate of Mr. Bassett's "educational establishment" since her earliest remembrance, having, indeed, been placed in Mrs. Bassett's charge when a mere baby of two years. She had never returned to England even for a visit, spending all her holidays at the Pension de Bassett. At rare intervals, in midsummer, she received a brief visit from her uncle, who was also her guardian; but he was an austere personage, grim and hard and taciturn, and Beryl always breathed more freely when he had departed. Of this uncle, she knew only that his name was William Star, that he was a bachelor and a gentleman farmer, and that he lived in Surrey, England. He paid her bills with unfailing regularity, but he never wrote to her, never exhibited any tenderness of feeling for her, but, on the contrary, always seemed to regard her with an actual aversion and abhorrence. What his intentions were in regard to her future, Beryl did not know.

This uncle was the only relative she possessed, so far as she knew. Of her own parentage she was completely ignorant. She was too proud to ask her teachers concerning her history; but if she had done so the inquiry would have been fruitless, they being no better informed upon the subject than she was herself.

As may, therefore, be supposed, Beryl Star was a living mystery to her school-fellows, as she was to herself. But, by virtue of her willfulness, her pretty imperiousness, her great, generous nature, her unselfishness and her beauty, she was the leading spirit of the little band to whom all deferred—the recognized queen of the school.

Even now, as she stood looking at distant Mont Blanc, and murmuring softly the words of Byron's poem, the person who was to change the whole current of her existence, who was to cause her the sharpest anguish a human soul can know, who was to wreck her young life and rob her almost of her faith in Heaven and in humanity, stood not ten feet distant from her, his gaze fixed also upon the distant Alps.

He was an English tourist, of a social grade superior to his compatriots on the *Bonivard*. He was not over two-and-twenty years of age, very handsome, with a dark and polished beauty seldom seen in Englishmen. His complexion was of an olive tint, his hair black as jet, his eyes of inky sombreness, yet with a red light gleaming in their depths. He was well-bred, quiet and reserved. He wore a plain gray suit and no jewelry, but the heavy dressing-bag at his feet was of Russia leather, and, on being casually opened, displayed fittings of solid gold and finest carved ivory. He was attended by a sleek, middle-aged valet, who remained at a respectful distance from him, yet within call.

This young gentleman was Rollyn Dane Conyers, generally known as Dane Conyers. He was an orphan, had already dissipated a handsome property, and was beginning to settle down upon the comparatively small income which still remained to him. He was a Sybarite, luxurious in all his tastes, determined to gratify himself in every fancy at whatever cost to himself or others, exquisitely selfish, and yet, notwithstanding these grave faults, was possessed of many delightful and charming qualities which procured him friends everywhere.

He withdrew his gaze from the scenery at the moment when Beryl Star turned her face toward him. Their eyes met. A look of admiration came with a sudden

glow into the young man's black eyes ; the girl blushed and averted her face.

Dane Conyers beckoned to his serving man, who approached him swiftly and silently.

"Huplick," said the young gentleman, in a whisper, "do you see that girl yonder? Does she belong to that school?"

"Yes, sir," replied Huplick, respectfully, his glance following that of his master ; "if you mean the girl with red hair hanging over her shoulders, and wearing a short, gray dress. She came on at Vevay with the rest."

Conyers dismissed his servant with a gesture, and Huplick retreated, sleek and imperturbable, but with an odd, disagreeable sort of smile upon his thick lips.

Dane Conyers bestowed a rapt attention upon Beryl throughout the remainder of the journey. He studied her singular beauty with the eyes of an artist ; a longing to hear her speak began to possess him, and a determination to make her acquaintance awoke within him. He had fallen in love at first sight with a girl of whom he knew literally nothing.

"But I will know her," he said to himself. "She is high-bred, of noble carriage, a trifle haughty and imperious, and is without doubt of noble birth. It is easy to see that she is romantic, impulsive and warm-hearted. I never before saw a woman whom I would be willing to marry, but I will marry her ; I never set my heart on having anything but I possessed it. That girl will be my wife. And now I must discover who and what she is!"

He was speedily enlightened. A girlish voice, high and shrill, called suddenly from the midst of the group of young ladies :

"Beryl! Beryl Star! Come here a minute, there's a darling!"

As Beryl moved to obey the call, Dane Conyers said to himself :

"Beryl Star ! An odd name but appropriate to her. She is English, undoubtedly. And now to make Miss Star's acquaintance !"

But that was not so easy even for Dane Conyers. No opportunity was afforded him to approach Beryl during the trip. The three governesses were Argus-eyed, and Beryl comported herself with such reserve and apparent unconsciousness of his existence, that Conyers maintained his distance with much inward chagrin.

But fate befriended him at the last. As the *Bonivard* neared the Quai du Montblanc at Geneva, his valet took charge of the traveling-bag, and Conyers made his way to the place of egress. There were crowding and confusion in the moment of debarkation. Mr. Bassett went in advance with one of the governesses, and the two remaining governesses brought up the rear. Beryl, somewhere in the midst of the throng of school-girls, crowded and jostled, missed her footing and stumbled. In a moment Dane Conyers had sprung to her assistance. He drew her arm in his and conducted her safely upon the quay, releasing her promptly, and raising his hat to her in a chivalrous bow. The girl had barely time to mark his features and to express her thanks, when a governess took her in close charge, and Conyers moved away, soon becoming lost to sight.

The day was spent by the pupils of the Pension de Bassett in a visit to the Botanic Garden, the Musiée Rath, and to "the meeting of the waters," a mile from Geneva, where the deep blue Rhone and the crystal Arve, fresh from the glaciers, mingle their currents. In a little inn near this spot the school-girls procured their

luncheon of rolls, butter and honey, and soon after set out with their protectors on a return to the steamer.

It had been a pleasant holiday, during which Beryl would, perhaps, not have thought even once of the dark young stranger she had seen in the morning, had she been permitted to forget him ; but her girl companions had bantered her about her "conquest," and one of her governesses had severely reproved her for accepting the civility of an unknown young man. As a natural consequence, she did think of him again and again.

On re-embarking upon the *Bonivard*, Beryl beheld, to her surprise, Dane Conyers already on board, attended by his valet. Conyers did not address her during the return voyage ; he had, indeed, no opportunity ; but now and then she encountered his gaze.

Conyers debarked at Vevay after Mr. Bassett and his charges.

He proceeded to the Hôtel Monnèt, secured rooms, and it being already about dusk, spent the evening in the reading-room of the hotel, with a good cigar.

The next morning he went out upon a solitary stroll, and discovered the Pension de Bassett after considerable search. It was situated upon the high-road to Consier, and was a large brick edifice in the midst of gardens, which were entirely surrounded by a brick or stone wall ten feet in height. Two massive doors in this wall gave ingress and egress—the one to carriages, the other to pedestrians.

"It's like a convent," thought Conyers. "The apples of Hesperides were not better guarded than these young ladies."

He made a tour of the premises, a portfolio under his arm to disarm suspicion in case he were seen by Mr. Bassett, and discovered that the house was well

screened by trees; that a flower-garden extended in the rear, with a shrubbery; and that, in the very rear of the premises, was an extensive kitchen-garden. He found, also, several crevices in the stone wall of considerable extent, half-hidden by growing vines; and these crevices, he also found, commanded a view of the flower-garden, shrubbery, arbors and summer-houses.

Satisfied with this discovery, he went back to Vevay.

Late in the afternoon he returned to the vicinity of the boarding-school, bearing, in addition to his portfolio, an exquisite bouquet. He ensconced himself at one of the breaks in the wall, and waited patiently in the shadow until the young ladies came out to walk in the garden at their usual hour of recreation. Beryl Star was one of a merry group. She turned into the garden-path that ran in the shadow of the wall, and as she came near, Dane Conyers flung his bouquet at her feet.

The next day Beryl avoided that particular walk, but she could not evade her unknown admirer. A bouquet came whirling through the air, falling at her feet as she paused to rest in a garden-chair.

And every day for a week, when Beryl took her evening stroll in the garden, a bouquet came to her with unfailing regularity. Her school-fellows delighted in the little mystery, for Conyers never showed himself. Lonely all her life-long; knowing nothing of love of kindred; with a host of strange, girlish yearnings; knowing nothing of the world and its wiles; treated by her prim governesses more as a clever machine than as a young woman—what wonder that Beryl should have grown to regard her admirer with deepening interest—that she should watch for his bouquets, and hide them away when they came? It was then she needed what

in all her life she had never known—a mother's care and love—and it was not hers.

At the end of the week, on a Saturday afternoon, a school-holiday, Beryl Star, with a governess and two school-fellows, visited Lesser's bookstore in quest of new music and books. Conyers, standing in the doorway of the Hôtel Monnet, saw her, and followed her into the shop. He found opportunity, during the preoccupation of the teachers, to address Miss Star, and his manner was so respectful that the innocent girl was in no wise alarmed. She was reserved and rather haughty at the assurance of the handsome stranger, but she was secretly pleased and flattered that she should have won his admiration.

The acquaintance thus strangely and unfittingly begun, was not suffered by Conyers to flag. He was thoroughly in earnest in his desire to marry this beautiful young girl. He had never loved before; he was ardent and passionate as Romeo; and the very obstacles that intervened between him and Beryl, only served to strengthen his pursuit of her.

At the end of June, the boarding-school was broken up, and the long summer holidays began. The pupils went away to their homes—all but Beryl. The Rev. Mr. Bassett and his wife went to England, to spend the vacation in securing new pupils. One governess went also to England. Another to her home in France. The remaining governess was left in charge of the pension, of the small household and of Miss Star.

This governess was extremely fond of her ease, and permitted Beryl to spend much of her time with a day-pupil of the school—an English girl residing with her parents in the town. This girl, older than Beryl, was a giddy, thoughtless creature, who, knowing her friend's

little romance, took care to foster it. It thus happened that during the summer days, Conyers and Beryl met often, walked and talked together, Beryl's friend being always with them, and, as the days and weeks went on, exchanged letters through the medium of the day-pupil, and finally became betrothed lovers.

One Tuesday afternoon, late in August, Beryl and her school-friend visited the beautiful garden attached to the new château of Monsieur Couvreu. Upon three days of the week this garden was opened to the public, but upon the remaining days a fee of one franc was demanded. Tuesday being one of the days upon which payment for entrance was expected, Beryl and her friend found the garden quite deserted. They sought a little kiosk, where they were soon after joined by Dane Conyers. Beryl's friend strolled up and down the garden-paths, within view, but beyond ear-shot.

"You look depressed to-day, my darling," said Conyers, when the young pair had exchanged greetings in love-fashion. "What has happened? Is the ogre about to return?"

"Yes," sighed Beryl, "my summer is past, Dane. Mr. and Mrs. Bassett will return this week, and school will recommence in a fortnight."

"And you must go back to the drudgery of lessons and school routine, and we shall not meet again," said Dane Conyers. "This must not be. Beryl, I love you, and you have promised to become my wife. Let me write to your uncle and ask his consent to our marriage?"

"He will refuse it," said Beryl, sorrowfully. "He has always hated me from my birth. I can't write to him, and I beg that you will not."

"You have no other relatives, Beryl?"



BERYL STA

"None, Dane. I am alone in the world, poor and uncared for. I am no heiress, as I told you long ago, but I am of good blood," the girl added, proudly.

"I knew that when I first saw you, dear," said Conyers. "I do not care for fortune with my wife, but it is essential that she should be of good family. I have no parents living, no one but myself to consult in my marriage, and my income is slender, being but eight hundred pounds a year. But we could live well upon that sum almost anywhere upon the continent," said Conyers, smiling. "I wish I had now all the money I have squandered uselessly. But we do not care for splendors, if we have each other."

"Have you no relatives living, Dane?"

"Yes, I have a titled uncle, but I have never seen him. My mother was not on friendly terms with him for many years, and there are two strong young lives between me and any possible accession to his title and wealth. He would laugh at my presumption if I dared address him on the subject of my marriage. You see I am as isolated in the world as you, Beryl. And now I must tell you what I came to say, my darling. Do you know where I was yesterday?"

Beryl replied in the negative.

"I had seen a cottage advertised to be let furnished near Lausanne, and I went to look at it. It has been occupied by an English family, is very pretty, and has an old serving-woman in charge, who would serve admirably as housekeeper. Beryl, I hired the cottage for three months," said Conyers, drawing nearer to her, and speaking in a tone full of caressing and pleading, "and I told the old woman that I would bring her young mistress home to-morrow. You have promised to be my wife, darling; be my wife now. Why should

we wait for the consent of your uncle, who cares nothing for you? We have only our two selves to consult. You love and trust me, darling, and you are all the world to me. You know that I am an honorable gentleman of good birth and some fortune. Shall I not have my bride now? Say yes, Beryl."

The girl's heart beat wildly, her pale cheeks glowed, her brown eyes drooped. She was sorely tempted to yield to her lover's passionate pleading. And he, seeing his advantage, continued to urge his cause with passionate anxiety and earnestness. He loved her with all his soul. The one desire of his life was to possess her as his wife. Beryl loved him in return. Her life was lonely and unsatisfied. To be loved and cherished as the being dearest of all the world to Dane Conyers seemed to her bliss too great to realize. Youth and love won the day, and Beryl promised to marry him at once.

Conyers, in rapture, clasped her in his arms and showered kisses upon her.

"My darling, may heaven deal with me as I deal with you," he murmured. "Your life shall henceforth be one long delicious happiness, unmarred by a sorrow. We will be married to-morrow at Geneva, and we will then go to our pretty cottage near Lausanne, for our honeymoon. But how shall we manage your journey to Geneva? I will go this evening, and procure a marriage license if one is required, and see the English clergyman, and you must come on by the early morning boat. I will meet you at the Quai du Montblanc, and we will drive directly to the English church. Will you be brave for my sake, and come to me in love and trust to-morrow, Beryl?"

"It is so soon," said Beryl, shrinkingly. "But I will

come, Dane, and Mary Graham shall come with me. She has been your ally from the first, and is eager to witness our marriage. I have permission to remain with her to-night and to-morrow. I do not yet see how we can quite manage it, but we will be there."

Mary Graham, the day-pupil heretofore referred to, was summoned from the adjacent paths to assist at the conference. She entered zealously into the lover's scheme, and promised her assistance. Plans were discussed and settled upon, and at length the party separated, the girls to proceed to Miss Grahams' residence, and Conyers to go to his hotel, and thence to journey to Geneva.

Beryl spent the night with her friend. In the morning, Miss Graham obtained permission of her mother to go to Geneva with Beryl, the two to be attended by Mrs. Graham's maid, a French woman of a frivolous turn of mind, but supposed to be a sufficient protector to two young ladies during a day's excursion.

Thus guarded, Beryl and her friend took the morning boat for Geneva. Long before their journey had ended, the French maid had been informed of the project on foot, and had been won to consent to serve as one of the witnesses of the intended marriage.

On debarking at the Quai du Montblanc, the little party was met by Dane Conyers and his valet. The lovers met in silence. A carriage was in waiting, and the girls and their maid entered it. Conyers mounted the box with the driver. The valet hurried away on foot.

The distance was very short to the English church in the Rue du Montblanc, opening out of the quay of the same name, and the valet arrived there as soon as did the carriage. Conyers alighted and assisted Beryl and

Miss Graham to the ground. The valet helped out the French woman, and gave her his arm. The party entered the church.

The clergyman was in waiting. The pew-opener and two or three English persons stood in the aisles expectantly. The bridal party marched up to the altar. There was but a brief delay, and the marriage ceremony proceeded, Huplick giving away the bride.

It was a singular bridal. The dim and nearly empty church; the bridegroom in handsome morning attire; the bride in a walking costume of white lawn trimmed with fluted ruffles; Miss Graham dressed in blue lawn; and the few curious-eyed strangers wondering at the fact that no troop of friends attended the young pair, and at the child-like appearance of the beautiful bride —all these made up a scene not often beheld.

The fateful ceremony was at length over. Beryl, half frightened, shy and trembling, was Beryl Star no longer, but Beryl Conyers. She stood as in a maze, while her young husband kissed her, and Miss Graham embraced her, and her face was very grave as she signed her name in the marriage register—so grave that one might have fancied that the pall of a sad future was shutting down already upon her young life.

They returned to the carriage; but now, with an air of happy triumph, Dane Conyers entered the vehicle also, and placed himself beside his young bride. The valet mounted the box. They drove down to the Quais, and crossed the Pont des Bergues, proceeding to the Cafe du Musee, where a wedding breakfast had been ordered by Conyers. A private parlor was in readiness for them, and bride and bridegroom, with Miss Graham, took possession of it, while Huplick and the French maid were served at a table in the open garden.

After the breakfast, the bridal party adjoined to Rousseau's Island, spending the time there under the trees until it became time to embark upon the return journey.

Then they took the boat—not the express steamer, but a vessel that stopped at nearly every point upon the northern side of the lake—and through the declining day glided over the deep blue waters, in a strange happiness that was like a lurid burst of sunshine before a storm.

At Ouchy the newly married pair debarked. Miss Graham and Beryl indulged in a fervid embrace, and then separated—the former to return to Vevay and school; the latter to begin the strange new life she had chosen—to walk to the end the thorny path whose beginning seemed now strewn with flowers.

CHAPTER II.

THUNDER IN A CLEAR SKY.

About three miles distant from Lausanne, and between one and two miles distant from Ouchy, stands a pretty little house, half-villa, half-chalet, with outside staircase, upper and lower balconies, a deeply projecting roof, and very wide casement windows. It was set in the midst of a shaded garden, whose lawn extended to the very edge of Lake Leman, and a quaint little German kiosk, with open sides and a peaked roof, stood upon an outjutting bluff, commanding a magnificent view of lake, opposite shores and the distant Alps, with their august king, Mont Blanc.

This was the house which Dane Conyers had hired for

three months—the home to which he brought his young bride upon the evening of the day of their marriage.

As they drove along the lake road and turned into the grounds of the Villa Belvoir, as the place was named, lights beamed from all the windows and streamed out at the open doors in pleasant welcome. The carriage drew up in front of the low stone steps, and Conyers helped out his bride, and led her into the house, Huplick paying and dismissing the cabman.

The hall was a wide, long room, with cool, tiled floor, and tall-backed walnut chairs and settle. They passed beyond to the drawing-room, a cosy apartment with mosaic flooring of different-colored woods, flowing lace curtains, and furniture covered with fresh and dainty pink chintz. The housekeeper joined them here, panting and breathless, apologizing for not having been at the door to receive them.

She was an energetic-looking woman, with an abrupt manner, but was prepossessing in her appearance, and Beryl liked her at once.

"Madame Pinnet," said her employer, after proper salutations had been exchanged, "show Mrs. Conyers to her room. When will dinner be served?"

"In half an hour precisely," replied Madame Pinnet, promptly. "Follow me, my dear—I beg your pardon, Madame, but you seem a mere child—and I will show you up-stairs."

Beryl followed her housekeeper, while Conyers went away to the dressing-room he had selected for his own use.

Beryl's rooms consisted of bed-room with dressing-room and bath attached, and opened upon a wide veranda to which was appended the picturesque open staircase. There were chairs upon the veranda, which

commanded a glorious view, as it fronted the lake. The rooms were simply furnished, but were exquisitely neat and clean, wearing a look of daintiness and freshness seldom seen in houses "to be let furnished."

Declining the assistance of the housekeeper, Beryl renovated her toilet as well as possible, brushed out her tawny hair, and then passed out upon the veranda.

"I feel like the old woman in the nursery rhyme," she said to herself; "I wonder if this be I, Beryl Star, of the Pension de Bassett. Perhaps I shall awaken presently and find it all a dream."

She was thinking of the liberty of her new life, of the love and care that were to be hers, of travel, of life in its broadest sense, which her lover had promised her, when Conyers came around the angle of the house and approached, halting at her side and encircling her waist with one arm.

"My little wife," he said, softly, kissing her hair. "I am not a good man, I fear, Beryl; I have many faults and weaknesses you could never understand; I am selfish and fond of having my own way at any and all cost, but, standing here to-night with you, I promise to be a better man for your sake, darling, and to become worthy of your trust and love."

"You are worthy now, dear," said the yonng bride, nestling nearer to him. "Think, Dane, dearest, you are the first young gentleman I ever knew. How strange that you should have fallen in love with me at first sight —with me whom my only relative hates!"

"That reminds me, Beryl," said Conyers, "that we must write to your uncle announcing our marriage. We will do so in a day or two, and we will write also to Mr. Bassett. I should like to see your uncle's surprise when he learns that you have escaped the bonds of his

authority. Do you know, darling, I have fancied from the first that you have a fortune of your own, and that your uncle would have inherited it had you died unmarried while a minor? That theory would account for his hatred of you."

"I do not believe that I have a fortune, Dane. Mrs. Bassett told me once that I was dependent upon my uncle."

"How could she know anything about you save what he told her? But, fortune or not, you are a fortune in yourself, my little wife."

"How much you think of my having been well born," said Beryl. "Do all Englishmen think so much of birth, Dane?"

"All who are themselves well born, dearest. I could never have married a woman, whatever her charms, who was not well born. I have noble connections, you know, and have a right to expect my wife to be more than an ordinary person. Perhaps I never told you—it's of no consequence—but I have seen your uncle's place in Surrey. It was a year ago, and I was visiting a friend in his neighborhood. I remarked your uncle's place at the time—Starwood, he calls it—from the fact that the house dates back to the days of the Tudors, and is a grand specimen of the country-house architecture of that date. When you told me that Mr. William Star, of Starwood, Surrey, was your uncle, I knew at once who and what you are. It is said that he is very rich, and as he is a bachelor, you will of course succeed to his wealth. So we will keep friends with him, Beryl, and write him a nice letter, asking him to forgive us, and so forth. I am quite anxious to receive his reply with 'Bless you, my children; come to Starwood at once.'"

Beryl laughed, and soon the young pair descended

the outer staircase to the lawn, and entered the dining-room through an open casement.

A tempting little dinner was served by Madame Pinnet and a buxom young woman whom she had engaged to assist her in household duties, and afterward the bridal pair walked in the moonlit garden and sat in the kiosk overhanging the lake, and Conyers quoted poetry in an impassioned voice, and talked like a new Romeo, and Beryl sat silent and oppressed with a happiness so exquisite that it was full of pain.

"And I am to be happy as this all my life?" said Beryl. "Oh, Dane, I can hardly realize it!"

"Life has greater bliss in store for us than you can even imagine, Beryl—travels by sea and shore, ascent of mountain peaks, dwellings in secluded valleys, rambles amid the world's great ruins, and a home, I hope, in old England at last—a home at Starwood, perhaps," said Conyers. "Let us think now what we shall say in our letter to your uncle."

They discussed phrases and turns of sentences at considerable length, Conyers betraying more interest in the subject than did Beryl.

The next day, the young man brought writing materials and his bride down to the little kiosk, and hours were consumed in writing the all-important letter to Mr. Star. Beryl wrote from Conyers' dictation, and an epistle was at length completed which satisfied them both.

It was of moderate length, announcing the marriage not too abruptly, and urging the little interest—the aversion even—which had always distinguished Mr. Star's manner to his niece, as the reason why Beryl and her lover had not delayed their marriage to ask his consent. It assured Mr. Star that his forgiveness was

earnestly desired by the young pair, and that they should await a letter from him with anxiety.

"That will do," said Conyers. "We won't humble ourselves too much. Mr. Star is an odd sort of man, and is as unsocial as a bear with a ruffled temper, I have heard. He won't like anything that looks like fawning. And now for the letter to Mr. Bassett. Your governess has, no doubt, been informed of your marriage, and must be in a high state of excitement. I will write that letter."

He hastened to do so, addressing the Rev. Edward Bassett, and informing him, without waste of words, that Miss Star had became Mrs. Dane Conyers, and requesting that her effects be forwarded to the Villa Belvoir, Ouchy, as soon as possible.

These letters were posted by Huplick upon the same day.

A week passed before any reply came to either letter. These days of waiting were employed by Conyers and Beryl in daily visits to Lausanne or Geneva, and in purchasing an outfit of new garments for the young bride, her effects not having been forwarded as requested.

But at last came a letter from the Reverend Mr. Bassett, full of stern reproach to his former pupil, accusing her of having inflicted an irreparable injury upon the Pension de Bassett by her runaway marriage, and assuring her that he would never forgive her, and that he trusted she would find her punishment in the future. In conclusion, he stated that he had written to Mr. Star, and that he awaited the orders of that gentleman in regard to the disposition of Miss Star's effects, which would, therefore, not be forwarded to the Villa Belvoir.

"A delightful letter," said Dane Conyers, smiling.

"The Reverend Bassett seems to think that his frown will make us miserable. What an amiable hope he indulges in in regard to our future! He may change his tone, if your uncle should choose to forgive us and invite us to Starwood!"

Another week passed before a letter came from England. The interval was delightfully employed in sails on the lake in the little lateen-sail rigged vessels, in rambles in the garden, in reading poetry together, in excursions to Ferney and to the Grand Salive, whose summit they achieved after a toilsome ride on donkeys. Never was honeymoon more delightful; never were a Romeo and a Juliet more blissful.

The fate that brooded darkly above them could not long be averted, however. The first shadow came in the letter from Mr. Star, which arrived one golden September day, when the pair were seated in the kiosk watching passing vessels and talking idly.

It so happened that they were speaking of the advantages in being well born, and Dane Conyers had just expressed himself strongly in regard to family connections, when Huplick, who had been to Lausanne tor the mail, came down the garden-path with a letter in his hand.

It was Conyers who received the letter and dismissed the valet, and Conyers who examined the postmark, exclaiming:

"Come, Beryl; the long-expected has arrived. Let us see in what terms our worthy uncle vouchsafes his forgiveness."

Beryl came and sat beside her husband, who drew her close to his side, her head upon his shoulder, while he opened the missive and read aloud these words:

"Starwood, Surrey, England.

"MR. AND MRS. DANE CONYERS: I have received your letter announcing your marriage; also a letter from the Rev. Mr. Bassett to the same effect. I am not at all surprised that Beryl should have made a runaway marriage. 'Bad blood will tell.' 'What is born in the bone will be bred in the flesh.' Allow me to say, in response to your uncalled-for announcement to me, that I have provided for Beryl only from a sense of duty; that I herewith wash my hands of her forever; that she will never inherit one penny of mine, and that I will never see either of you—so help me Heaven! One word in conclusion: It will be well not to boast of your relationship to me, since Beryl is the daughter of my sister, Jenny Star, who died many years ago, and Beryl never had a father. Wishing Mr. Dane Conyers joy of his base-born, penniless bride, and Mrs. Dane Conyers equal joy of her fortune-seeking husband, I am

"Not your friend and well-wisher,

"WILLIAM STAR."

CHAPTER III.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

Conyers read every word of her uncle's letter aloud to his young wife, his voice growing strangely husky as he neared its close. When he had finished, the letter dropped from his hands to the floor of the kiosk, and for some moments silence reigned between the young pair. Beryl felt his arm drop away from her waist, felt his whole person shrink away from her. To the anguish evoked by her uncle's letter, a deadlier terror was now added.

"Dane!" she cried, "you don't blame me, do you? I did not know—I did not know, dear! Look at me, Dane. Speak to me!"

She clung to him in agonized beseeching, clasping her arms around him, but he put her away; not roughly, but so deliberately as to chill her soul, and arose and stood against the balustrade, his back toward her, his gaze apparently fixed upon Mont Blanc. Beryl crept after him, bewildered and agonized, and laid her hand timidly on his arm. He did not look down upon her, or notice her presence by a movement.

"Dane," she sobbed, "are you angry? I never deceived you. I never said I was my uncle's heiress."

Conyers did not turn nor lower his gaze. He stood stern and immovable, but now he said, icily:

"You told me that you were of good birth."

"How could I suspect the truth? I was but two years old when I was brought to Vevay by my uncle,

and placed in the care of the Bassetts. My uncle never told me. Dane, I am not to blame. Think, the shock of this discovery is as great to me as to you."

Conyers made no response.

Beryl was silent a little while, an awful wave of desolation sweeping over her soul. But at last her love for her husband, her longing for sympathy and words of kindness, impelled her to plead anew to him.

"Dane," she said, in a low, broken voice, "dear Dane, I will be a better wife to you all my days, if you will only overlook this stain upon my birth. I am the same girl you married, the same loving Beryl, and I will be your very slave if you will only love me again. I did not mean to deceive you."

"Perhaps not," said Conyers, stiffly; "but I have been grossly deceived. I fell in love with you at first sight, but, as God hears me, had I loved you a million times as well, I would not have married you, knowing you to be base-born. In our first interview you told me who you were. I had seen Starwood and known of Mr. Star—at least, that he was a bachelor, morose, unsocial, and very wealthy. I had never heard in Surrey of your existence, but when you told me that Mr. Star was your uncle and only living relative, I very naturally supposed you to be the legitimate daughter of his younger brother."

The words, clear and metallic, sounded upon Beryl's ears like a knell. She shuddered, with a low moan that ought to have pierced her husband's heart; but that heart, in its wounded pride and outraged selfishness was harder than a mill-stone.

"Oh, Dane! Dane!" she said, "I am your wife—your own wife—"

"Unfortunately, yes, you are my wife!" said Con-

yers, with a bitter sneer. "You have achieved the shelter of an honorable name ; that is true. But think of me, with my connections, my honorable family, my—Think ! I stand here at two-and twenty with a life blighted by my own folly ! I have married—what ?"

He turned abruptly, and plunged into the garden.

Beryl called to him to come back, and ran after him, to the step of the kiosk, but he did not look around or speak to her. She sank down upon the step, stunned and grief-stricken, conscious only that her short day of happiness was over.

It was hours later when at last she aroused herself from her stupor, and lifted her tawny head. Her uncle's fatal letter rustled at her feet. She picked it up mechanically and thrust it into her pocket, and then the recollection of her misery burst upon her.

She sought her husband in the garden ; she ran along the shore of the lake ; he was not there. She hurried to the house, new terrors gaining upon her. He was not in the drawing-room, not in the dining-room. She flew up the stairs, calling his name. But the voice whose tones had been music to her did not answer. The bedroom and the dressing-room were alike empty. But her writing-desk stood open by a window, and upon the desk lay a letter.

Beryl seized upon the letter. It was addressed to herself in Conyers's handwriting, and was sealed. She tore it open, and read the following lines :

"BERYL : I must have a little time to reconcile myself to the altered aspect of our affairs. I am going away for a day or two, and shall take Huplick with me. I will return as soon as I can meet you calmly.

DANE."

That was all. No word of love or sympathy for the young wife; no thought in this supreme hour save of self.

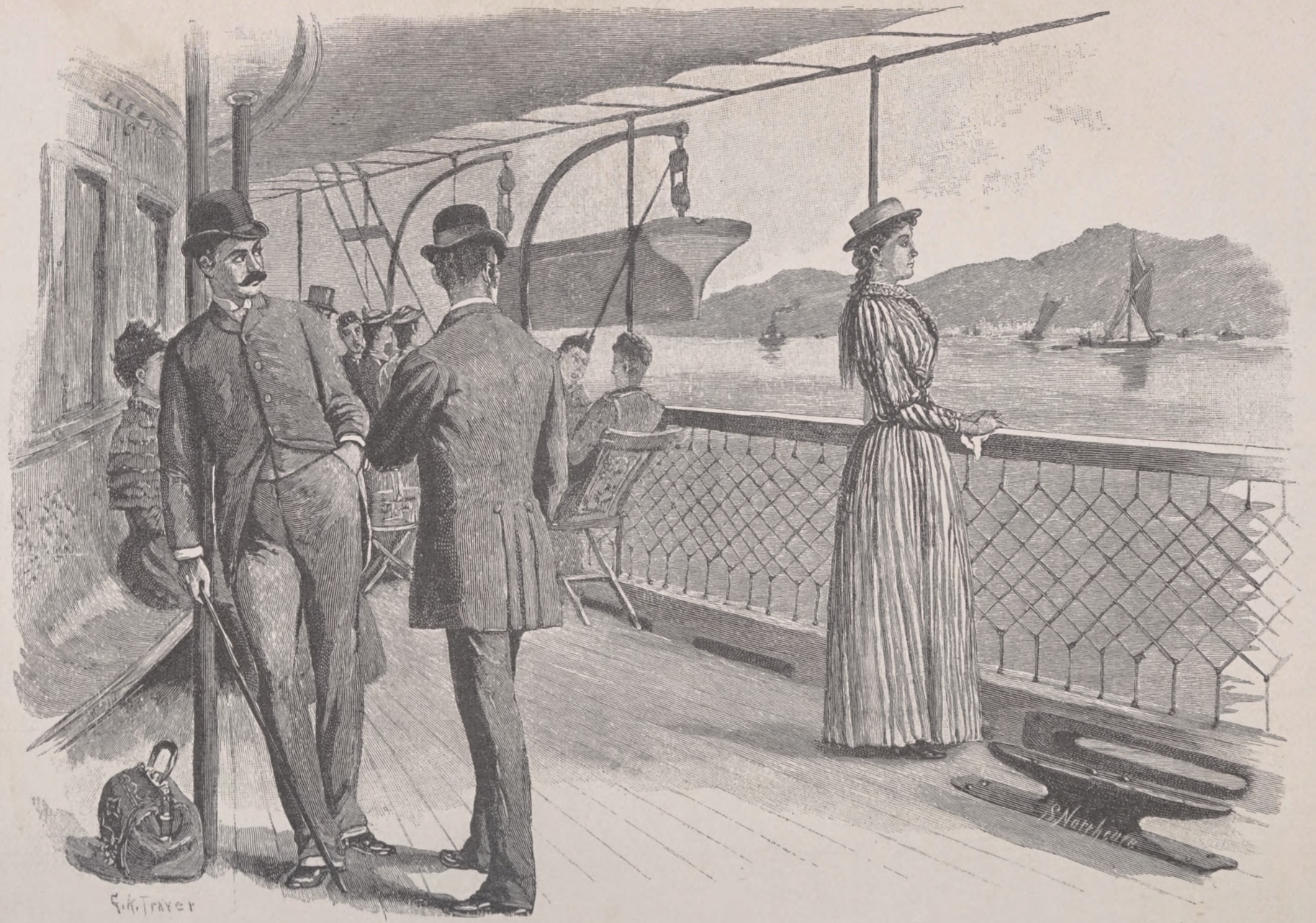
Beryl examined her desk. All the letters Conyers had written to her throughout the summer were gone, and a pile of gray ashes on the hearth, with scraps of burnt and shriveled paper upon it, testified that he had destroyed them in his rage.

She remained in her own room during the evening. The housekeeper came up to announce dinner, and the young mistress informed her that Mr. Conyers was gone away for a day or two.

The "day or two" which Dane Conyers had fixed as the limit of his absence passed slowly, and then, instead of his return, came a letter from him dated at Geneva, stating that he could not prevail upon himself to return to the Villa Belvoir immediately, and was about to undertake an excursion, attended by Huplick, to the Matterhorn. He would be gone, he thought probable, a week or ten days.

From that moment the wronged young wife ceased utterly to expect her husband's return.

Meanwhile, Conyers had spent a day in Geneva in battling with his fierce pride, which nothing could conquer. He was angered against his wife. At times he suspected her of having known her history from the first, and deliberately made him her dupe and victim. He thought of her wondrous beauty with abhorrence, as the snare that had enmeshed him. He hated her at times with a blterness that had in it something murderous. He had deceived himself in thinking her her uncle's heiress, but he laid the blame of the deception upon her. He had hurried away from the Villa Belvoir mad with passion, vaguely intending to return a little later.



GAZING ON MONT BLANC.—*See Page* 8.

But when he wrote the letter dated at Geneva, an event had occurred which caused him to resolve upon a deliberate abandonment of the young wife, whose only fault was that she had loved him too well. His promise to return, in the later letter, was intended but to keep her quiet until he should rid himself of her altogether. The event was the reception of a letter of the most startling moment.

Upon arriving at Geneva by rail, Conyers had proceeded to the Hotel de Russie. At nightfall he was in his private parlor, which commanded a view of Mont Blanc. His table was laid for dinner, and Huplick was moving about the apartment with his usual cat-like step. This sleek valet, knowing nothing of the contents of Mr. Star's letter, supposed that his young master and mistress had quarrelled, in which case his sympathies were decidedly with the former.

Huplick presented a letter.

"If you please, sir," he said, "I went to the post-office this morning, and inquired for any letters for you. You will remember, sir, that you ordered your bankers to send on any letters that might come for you to Geneva, *post restante.* This letter is forwarded from England, sir."

"From England? I owe no one in England. It can't be a dun. Let me see it."

Huplick presented the letter. It was inclosed in a large square white envelope, heavily bordered with black. It was sealed with black wax and stamped with a crest.

"The Hawkhurst crest!" muttered Conyers, in amazement. "Why should any of the Hawkhurst family write to me? It may be from the earl himself. If so, it is singular that he should deign to recognize my exist-

ence. All my life my noble connections never noticed me, and now for the first time I receive their recognition."

His lips curled sneeringly, and he proceeded deliberately to cut open the letter at the end, in a manner to preserve both address and crest. A sheet of letter-paper, bordered with black and folded but once, was withdrawn, and he read its contents as follows :

"Hawks' Cliff, Cornwall, Eng., Sept 9th, 1880.

"ROLLYN DANE CONYERS, ESQ.—*Dear Sir* : I write to inform you—what you have doubtless already learned from your London banker or some officious friend—that my two nephews, sons of my late brother, the Honorable James Desmond, are dead. They were lost in a yachting excursion off the coast of Norway in the early part of last month. The elder of these brothers, Harcourt Desmond, had he outlived me, would have succeeded to my title and estates. His death is a sore blow to me. In default of the children of my only brother, you, Rollyn Dane Conyers, the son of my late cousin Rollyn Conyers, are the next heir to the Earldom of Hawkhurst.

"You are, doubtless, aware that I was never friendly with your father, the late Rollyn Conyers. He was not an upright, honorable gentleman, as you must know. I write this frankly, that you may understand what follows. If you resemble your father in character, it will not be well to put into your hands too much wealth and power. I cannot alienate from you the title I now bear ; but the estates are absolutely my own, to do with as I please, and I purpose bestowing them upon one worthy to succeed to them.

"The next in the line of succession to the title after

yourself is s young relative of mine, distant by blood, yet bearing my family name, who is called Noble Desmond. He is nearly the same age with you. I have never seen him.

"I shall spend the remainder of September and half of October in Scotland. I desire you to come to Hawks' Cliff about the middle of October—say the 20th. I write to-day to Noble Desmond, inviting him to visit me at the same time. I shall study your character and his, and whichever of you two I find the more worthy shall succeed to my entire wealth.

"There is but one thing more to say—I am lonely, a widower and childless. I have a fancy that he who inherits my money and estates shall make a brilliant marriage—one that will confer honor upon the name of Hawkhurst. The future Countess of Hawkhurst may be low-born, for I cannot control your marriage; but the future mistress of Hawks' Cliff, the future dispenser of my income, must and shall be of noble blood. If, therefore, you should, in any moment of young folly or passion, have betrothed yourself to any ordinary middle-class person, you need not come to Hawks' Cliff. In that case, I shall occupy myself with Noble Desmond. I write to him, also, that he need not come to me unless he is heart-free. Should you both be fettered by engagements that will not comport with my plans, I will look outside my own family for my heir.

"You need not write to me, but may come to Hawks' Cliff at the time appointed—should you be unfettered by any promise of marriage—without preliminary announcement.

(Signed.) "HAWKHURST."

When Conyers had finished reading the letter in

silence, he breathed a curse so terrible that even Huplick started. Then he rushed into his bed-room and closed and locked the door. Huplick permitted the servant to bring on the dinner, and, after sending him away, coolly sat down and ate it, listening intently to the sound of raging in the inner room. In due course of time he sent away the empty dishes, and stretching himself upon a sofa, awaited the reappearance of his young master.

It was somewhere about ten o'clock when Dane Conyers came forth, pale, haggard, and strangely savage. His black eyes burned with evil fires. The careless gayety that had distinguished him was gone from his countenance.

Huplick was on his feet, sleek, alert and furtively watchful.

"Shall I order your dinner now, sir?" he asked.

"No; but ring for brandy."

Conyers flung himself in an arm-chair. The brandy was brought, and he drank half a glassful at a swallow.

"Shall I order breakfast earlier than usual to-morrow, sir?" inquired the valet.

"What for?"

"Why, so that you can catch the early train to Lausanne, sir," said Huplick, meekly. "I suppose you will be in a hurry to see Mrs. Conyers."

Conyers's wrath broke forth in a torrent of oaths that was positively appalling. He cursed his valet, he cursed Beryl, he cursed himself.

"Hurry to see her, you fool?" he said, when he had begun to grow calmer. "Hurry to the woman who has destroyed my life, the fair cheat, the lying, low-born entrapper! Read that, and never speak her name to me again."

He tossed the Earl of Hawkhurst's letter to his valet, who read it greedily, his jaw falling as he neared its termination.

"So then you won't be nothing but Hearl, sir," he ejaculated; "you gets the shell, as 'twere, and t' other young gentleman gets the meat."

"Earl on eight hnndred a year!" sneered Conyers; "I shall make a fine peer!"

"But Mrs. Conyers will be rich. You told me your own self, sir, before your marriage, that she was heiress to a rich uncle in Surrey."

"I thought so then. But her uncle disowns her. He won't give her one penny. She is base-born—curse her. And she's my wife!"

Huplick began to consider his young master as Beryl's victim. He was thoughtful for some time, weighing matters in his own mind. At last he walked to the door on the tips of his toes, and peered into the hall. Re-entering, he locked the door and came close to his master.

"Mr. Conyers," he said, in a whisper, "why do you give up all for lost? Why don't you retrieve yourself?"

"How?"

"I can give you an idea, sir. You've three weeks or more to work in, and you can do a great deal in three weeks. Mrs. Conyers is young, inexperienced and utterly friendless. It will be easy to manage her, and she'll have no fine friends to come to her assistance. If I were well paid, I think I could suggest a plan by which you could succeed to the great Hawkhurst inheritance."

"Make me the heir of the earl, Huplick. and you shall be my valet as long as you live, at three times your present pay."

Huplick smiled.

"I don't expect to be a valet all my days, sir; not even a Hearl's valet. A neat family hotel at the West End of London, with a private bar, handsome parlors, and well-furnished bed-rooms, would be about my figure. I should say that five thousand pounds outright, after the present Hearl dies, and you come into his entire property, would be about right."

"What will you do on those terms?"

"Free you forever from the claims of your wife!" was the whispered response. "Forever, sir! You can go to England as a bachelor, win the Hearl's favor, and when he drops off you'll step directly into his shoes."

"How can this be acomplished?"

The valet proceeded to unfold his plan. Conyers heard and applauded, entering into it heart and soul.

In accordance with his plan, he wrote the next morning to Beryl the letter we have mentioned, in which he stated his determination to visit the Matterhorn, and his purpose to be absent a week or ten days. Upon the very day in which he wrote the letter, still in acordance with his valet's accepted scheme, he did indeed set out for Zermatt, whence excursions are made to the Matterhorn, attended by Huplick.

CHAPTER IV.

HUPLICK'S PLAN CARRIED OUT.

Arrived at Zermatt, Conyers reconsidered his plan. It was discovered that an ascent of the Matterhorn without guides would be regarded as a freak of madness, the very idea seeming to create a hubbub of excitement at his hotel.

"We shall have to try Monte Rosa then," said Conyers, in the privacy of his own room, addressing his valet. "Ladies often ascend Monte Rosa, and yet it has perils only less frightful, during the latter portion of its ascent, than those of the Matterhorn. During the last hour or two of the ascent one has to climb by means of footholds cut in the ice. That will be difficult enough for us. Let us move on to the Reil Inn immediately."

The Riffel Hotel on the Riffelburg Mountain furnished a good starting-point for the proposed excursion, and Conyers journeyed thither the same day.

On the day after, arising at dawn, he set out with Huplick upon his excursion. He had not communicated his design over-night to any one, but now imparted it to two of the waiters whom he encountered in departing. They expostulated, but to no effect. Conyers and his valet departed immediately, the latter carrying ropes and a basket of provisions.

Conyers had ascended Monte Rosa before, and knew what course to take. He was a good walker, and his quick stride soon took him out of sight from the inn, Huplick keeping up with him.

They traversed the Gorner and Monte Rosa glaciers in safety, alpenstocks in hand, and after over three hours' hard toil, reached Auf dem Felsen, where they procured breakfast, and where Conyers was offered a guide, whose services he declined, saying that he knew the route as well as any guide. Hour after hour of unremitting toil followed. It was past noon when the lower Sattel was ascended and a second halt was made. Thus far the ascent had been laborious; now the peril was to come. The route for the next hour and a half ascended on the brink of an abyss, by means of steps cut in the ice. But dangerous as was their progress, Conyers was not tempted to turn back.

The final portion of the way lay over rocks, and was not less fatiguing than what had preceded. The two gained the summit, and flung themselves down to rest. They consumed their provisions, and Huplick gave expression to his delight at the success that had so far attended them.

"It is better to actually make the ascent, toilsome and perilous as it is," said Conyers, raising a flask of brandy to his mouth. "The excursion looks more like a genuine thing. If an accident happens upon the return, why the people below will be ready to affirm that it is no more than they expected from my foolhardiness."

They set out on their return with but brief delay. Descending the section of rocks at the top of the mountain they entered upon that portion which we have described as being one profound peril. Here the utmost care was required to prevent their pretense from becoming a terrible reality.

They came at last to a cleft in the mountain, so deep and sheer that it resembled a chimney, by which name

it was known to the guides. It was a well, many thousand feet deep, with clean-cut sides.

Conyers came to a halt, fixing his alpenstock firmly in the snow, and looked significantly at his valet.

"This is just the place, Huplick," he said.

The man assented.

Conyers drew off his muffler and flung it down into the abyss. It caught somewhere thirty feet below upon a mere point of projecting rock, as the two could see by a bit of burning stick the valet flung down after it.

"That is enough," said Conyers. "So perishes Dane Conyers to his wife. I shall call myself Rollyn Conyers hereafter—remember, Huplick. If a report of my death gets into the English newspaper, I can contradict it easily enough. My wife will never see an English paper."

They resumed the descent.

"Won't she go to Lord Hawkhurst for money, sir?' said Huplick.

"No, she don't know of the earl's existence or that he is any relative of mine. I never mentioned his name to her. As I had never seen him, and he had never seemed to know that there was such a person as Rollyn Dane Conyers, I never specified the name of my 'noble connections,' in speaking of them to my wife."

They passed the perilous portion of the journey in safety. They had encountered no one upon the mountain. Now the sky began to darken, and a thin fall of snowflakes began to thicken the air.

"We part here," said Conyers, halting. "Don't let too great an outcry be made. Don't mention my relationship to Lord Hawkhurst. Let it be supposed that I am a poor devil of a tourist, who has lost his life by his foolhardiness, and but little will be said about me in the newspapers. I have left a little money at the

Villa Belvoir. Advise my wife to take that and hide—you have your instructions, however."

The young man took off his light cap, turning it wrong side out. It now appeared as a black cap. His great-coat was black. He produced a short gray beard from his pocket, and a wig to match, and donned them with Huplick's assistance. A heavy, coarse red muffler was also brought to light from beneath his coat, and a pair of spectacles assisted in his disguise. The handsome, black-mustached youth had given place to a commonplace-looking elderly man. Even Beryl would not have known him now.

Master and man parted after a few further words. Conyers knew his intended course well, and had in his pocket a map of the mountain. He had a few provisions, a stout alpenstock and a stout heart to sustain him.

The snow-storm thickened as the night came on. Mountaineers were herding their flocks in the valleys below, and Conyers still encountered no one. He descended the mountain safely, and gained the Moro Pass after a long and laborious walk.

It was with difficulty that Conyers kept to the road. The whirling snow-flakes blinded him ; the cold stung him sharply. He was obliged to advance with caution, lest he should miss his footing at one side or the other of the road. As the night deepened, a few stars glimmered palely at intervals in the heavens, but for the most part darkness prevailed.

An hour past midnight, cold, benumbed and half-dead with fatigue, he staggered into the mountain village of Macugnaga, and made his way to the Hotel Monte Moro. He managed to arouse the inn-keeper, and gained admittance. The snow was brushed from his person, and

he was cared for in the ample kitchen, and hot drinks were brought to him. He sat in the warm chimney-corner while he told his story to the sympathizing landlord.

"I come from Saas," he said, feebly. "I am going southward. I am a poor old man, friendless, a German, but I have money to requite your kind offices."

They gave him supper and a bed. He locked himself in his own room, and slept profoundly until noon of the next day. Then he came forth in his clever disguise, and a hot breakfast was served to him.

"You were lucky to get through safely last night, sir," said the landlord, waiting upon him. "It was a bad night, sir, and the pass is dangerous in the darkness and snow. A man has come over this morning; he arrived not an hour ago, and reports a fearful accident on Monte Rosa yesterday afternoon."

"An accident? No one killed, I hope?"

"Yes; a poor young Englishman had made the ascent with his servant and without a guide," said the landlord. "He went up safely, but the snow blinded him as he came down, and the storm came on, and he missed his footing and slipped, and fell headlong down the Devil's Chimney. They never'll see his body again. No guide would descend after it, except under urgent stress, and this poor fellow had no money nor friends. A party is making up at Zermatt to visit the scene of disaster."

"If people will be rash, they must pay the penalty of their rashness," said Conyers, helping himself to a further supply of coffee. "What was the young man's name?"

"I do not know, sir. I did not hear it."

Conyers finished his breakfast composedly, and settled his bill, soon after resuming his journey on foot. Hav-

ing announced himself as poor, it was necessary to carry out the fiction as if true.

He arrived before nightfall at Vanzone, and stopped at a little inn. The next day he walked to Vogogna. Upon the third day he reached Lake Maggoire. Upon this day, in a secluded spot upon the mountain-road, he made certain changes in his toilet, removed his false beard and wig, and shaved his face smooth. He stopped at Pallanza that night. The remainder of his journey was easy. He proceeded leisurely to Genoa, where he arrived three days later, and he engaged passage to Marseilles in a steamer starting the next day.

It was nearly a week after leaving Genoa when he arrived in Paris, and domiciled himself at the Hotel Meurice. He dined in his own parlor, and rang for a file of *Galignani's* newspapers dating back a fortnight. They were brought to him, and he proceeded to search the columns of news. He presently found what he sought, but the item was in the latest issue of the paper.

"How long it takes for a bit of news to reach Paris," thought Conyers. "But if the accident had happened to a lord, the papers would have been ringing with the story a week ago. Let's see what they say."

He read :

"ACCIDENT AT MONTE ROSA.

"Upon the 23d ult., a young Englishman and his servant attempted the ascent of Monte Rosa, without a guide. They made the ascent successfully, but a blinding snow-storm set in as they were descending, and the young man missed his footing and slipped for several yards, falling into the Devil's Chimney, a well-like fissure many thousand feet in depth. The servant made

his way back to the Riffel Hotel, but the night had fallen and the storm had increased, so that not a guide could be found to visit the scene of the catastrophe that night. The next day a party of guides went from Zermatt, and a scarf of the unfortunate man was discovered by the light of the torches, as it hung many feet below the mouth of the fissure upon a projecting rock. The scarf must have caught as the poor fellow swept past to his death. No attempt was made to recover the body—such an attempt being useless. The young man's name was Vane Conroy. He was poor, and without relatives to mourn his untimely fate."

Conyers fairly gloated over this paragraph.

"Good! Good!" he muttered, when he had finished. "And the name—Vane Conroy—that is clever. It is enough like my name to appear to Beryl a misprint, if she should chance to see the printed account, and no one knowing Dane Conyers would suspect that name to be intended for mine. I shall be the earl's heir. By this time, Huplick has broken the sad news to Beryl that she is a widow."

CHAPTER V.

AS TO THE PLOT.

Huplick had carried out his part in the evil scheme he and his young master had concocted, with an apparent sincerity that stamped him as an actor of ability. He had returned to the Riffel Inn in a seeming agony of grief, had implored assistance in returning to seek for his master, and had appeared actually frantic, when informed that there were no guides nearer than Zermatt, the one who had been at the inn in the morning having departed ; and that an ascent of Monte Rosa in such a snow-storm and without guides was an impossibility.

There was, of course, an official investigation of the supposed tragedy, but this lasted less than a day. Huplick was required to tell his story to the leading rulers of the town, but his testimony did not conflict in a single point with his previous statements. Two servants of the Riffel Inn whom Conyers had encountered at the moment of setting out upon his excursion testified that they had begged the young Englishman to employ guides, but he had answered them roughly, saying that he knew the mountain. Conyers's travelling-bag was examined, but there was nothing in it which could serve as a clue to the history of the missing man —the conspirators had seen to that. There was a suit of clothes in plain black, and changes of undergarments —nothing more.

The investigation over, Huplick claimed his master's effects on the ground that there was money due him for

services rendered. This claim was not heeded. The valise was retained by the authorities in view of a possible claimant in the shape of a relative. Huplick remained at Zermatt two days, and then returned to Geneva.

His first visit here was to the post-office.

He found awaiting him a letter addressed in a disguised hand, which, on being opened, was found to contain these words, in the same disguised penmanship, bearing neither date nor address :

"*All well.*"

This was a message Conyers had agreed to send him from the first postal village he reached in Italy. Huplick carefully destroyed the missive and made his way to the office of the *Journal de Genève*, a leading daily newspaper.

Here he told his story of his master's fate, giving Conyers's name as "Vane Conroy." He supported his story with a statement which he had drawn up at Zermatt, and to which were appended the name of the three guides who had visited with him the scene of the alleged disaster.

His statement was published in the next day's issue of the *Journal*, and was substantially copied into *Galignani's Messenger* at Paris at a later date—being the item which Conyers himself read in Paris, as we have described.

Having arranged for this publication in the *Journal* Huplick proceeded to the Hotel de Russie. Conyers, on leaving for Zermatt, had left here his elegant dressing-bag and a small portmanteau. The valet produced an order for these things, received them, and took the afternoon boat to Ouchy.

He arrived at the Villa Belvoir about sunset. The

gate was unlocked, and he let himself into the garden. No windows were open upon the side overlooking the road. Huplick went around to the rear gardens. The verandas above and below were unoccupied. He entered the kitchen and found Madame Pinnet in the act of skimming her *pot-au-feu*.

She uttered a scream at sight of him, and dropped her ladle.

"So you've come, Monsieur," she cried, volubly, in French. "And without a warning, and here we dine but meagerly, as it might be a fast-day. The Madame has no appetite—poor dear! Where is Monsieur?"

"Where is Madame?" responded Huplick. "I have news for her."

"In the kiosk, whence she watches continually for the steamers," said Madame Pinnet.

Huplick turned down the garden paths, bearing in his hands his master's luggage, and neared the kiosk.

Beryl was leaning upon the balustrade overhanging the water, her eager gaze following the steamer from which Huplick had disembarked at Ouchy, and which was now on its way to Villeneuve and the intervening ports.

The young bride looked slender—almost shadowy. She was dressed in white, and her tawny hair fell over her shoulders in a great mass of kinks and waves, and looked like a red flame in the glow of the sunset. She turned her head at the sound of Huplick's slow footfalls, and he saw how pale and wistful, how wan and sorrowing was her face, even while its glorious beauty was undimmed.

She saw him even as he did her, and in an instant the expression of her face had changed, becoming glad and beaming. She started toward him, and at the same

moment the valet ascended the steps of the kiosk and laid down his burdens on the marble floor, and stood before her, grave, silent and as one overcome with a great grief.

Beryl looked upon him in amazement.

"What is the matter, Huplick?" she demanded. "Is Mr. Conyers arrived?"

"No, madam. I came alone."

The gladness died out of Beryl's face.

"Why are you here alone?" she asked, sharply. "Why have you brought back my husband's dressing-bag? When will he return?"

"I have ill news for you, madame," said the valet, trying to speak gently, but succeeding only in being more sleek than usual. "I have brought back my master's dressing-bag because it belongs to you now with all his effects."

Beryl shuddered and her eyes dilated.

"I don't understand," she whispered.

"No? My young master left his home in a strange and desperate mood," said the valet, smoothly. "He was wild and reckless, as I had never before seen him. We went to Zermatt. We made the ascent of Monte Rosa. He would not have a guide. There was a snow-storm—he made a misstep—he slipped and fell—"

Beryl sprang forward with a strange cry.

"He—he was hurt?" she gasped.

"Can you bear the truth, madam?" said Huplick, solemnly. "My poor young master is dead!"

There was a moment's awful silence. Beryl did not shriek nor fall to the floor in a swoon, as the valet expected her to do. But she looked at him with a face in which burned two great brown eyes like fires. A

slow shudder crept over her slight frame, and she sunk down upon the bench without a word.

A sensation of awed nervousness stole over the valet.

"He never knew what hurt him, madam," he said, uneasily and awkwardly. "He fell into a well-like fissure four thousand feet deep. Here is the statement of the guides."

He gave her the document, to which the three guides had appended their names.

Beryl's burning eyes scanned it, and her dazed brain managed to gather all its meaning.

"Dead!" she whispered. "Dead!"

"Yes, madame, dead—and buried, too, for the fissure will serve as his grave. It is impossible to recover his body."

"Dead!" repeated Beryl. "Dead!"

She covered her face, and the valet, after waiting a little for her to speak, stole away with his luggage, and returned to the house. The sunset faded and the night came on.

Late in the evening the young wife bade Huplick be brought to her sitting-room. Madame Pinnet ventured a remonstrance, but as Beryl passed into her dressing-room unheeding, she called the sleek valet who was in the hall outside. He entered the dressing-room, finding Beryl in an easy-chair, and looking like some storm-swept flower.

Madame Pinnet remained in the bed-room, weeping softly, and listening to the remarks of her young mistress and Huplick.

"Tell me more about my husband, Huplick," said the young wife, tremulously. "Was there no last word for me? Did he never speak my name after leaving here?"

"Never but once, madam, and that was on the fatal day when he met his death," said Huplick glibly. "Upon that day, as we rested upon the summit of Monte Rosa, a change seemed to come over his wild and reckless mood, and he says to me, says he, 'Huplick, do you believe in presentiments?' And says I, 'Why, no, sir.' Then says he, 'Huplick, I feel a strange depression,' says he, 'which is like a presentiment of approaching evil. And,' says he, 'it may be that something is going to happen to me. If I should come to any harm,. he goes on, 'break the news gently to my poor wife, and tell her there's money in my desk which she is to have, and she is to have all my effects. And tell her,' says he, 'that I am not worthy her tears; that I have been vile and wicked; that I married her because I supposed her an heiress; and tell her, too, that Dane Conyers is not my real name, but that my real name will never be known to her. Tell her these things if anything should happen to me, but not otherwise.'"

"And those were his last words of me?" said Beryl.

"His very last—excepting— But I cannot tell the rest. He is dead, and the words had best not be repeated," said Huplick, artfully.

"I command you to tell me," said the young wife, with a sorrowful sternness. "Whatever he said of me you must tell me."

"He said this, madam," said Huplick, with feigned reluctance. "He said, if nothing did happen to him, he would never live with you again, never acknowledge you as his wife; that, in fact, he would repudiate you. He married you under an assumed name, and the marriage is, therefore, not legal."

Beryl arose to her feet, the incarnation of outraged innocence.

"He said this—to you?"

"Yes, madam, I swear it."

"And is it true?"

"It is true that 'Dane Conyers' is not his real name," said Huplick. "It is true that his marriage under an assumed name is no marriage. It is true that you were not his wife; that you are now not his widow. It is true that his story of having an income of eight hundred pounds a year was a pure fabrication. He was an adventurer, bent on marrying an heiress. Had you proved to be an heiress, as he expected, he would have retained as his own the very respectable name under which he married you."

Beryl pointed to the door.

"Leave me," she said. "Go!"

"Yes, madam. I will remain at the villa to-morrow, and shall be ready to give you further particulars in regard to my master's death."

He bowed low and withdrew.

Beryl dismissed Madame Pinnet, thus finding herself alone. She paced to and fro like a caged lioness. A mere child of sixteen years, brought up in a convent-like exclusion, she was innocent as a dove, pure as an angel, and upon points of law as ignorant as a babe. Truthful, honest, frank and unsuspicious, she did not doubt a word of Huplick's story. Her life had been so dreary always that it was easier for her to believe that evil should happen to her rather than good.

After a while she caught sight of Conyers's portmanteau and dressing-bag just inside the door. She picked them up, and carried them to a table under the light of clustering wax candles. The keys were attached to the handles of the luggage, and Beryl opened the portman-

teau, and emptied out its contents. They consisted of clothing ; nothing more.

She opened the dressing-bag presently. Here were his dainty perfumes, his gold-stoppered bottles, his carved ivory-handled brushes, and, yes, his little private tourist's diary in which she had seen him writing, but which he had laughingly refused to show her.

It was a little volume bound in cream-colored morocco, with gold-tipped corners, golden clasps, and a tiny golden padlock. The key was gone. Beryl remembered that Conyers had worn the key on his watch-chain. There was a small iron poker on the hearth, and Beryl pried off the dainty clasps, lock and all, with a relentless hand.

Conyers had scarcely written in his diary after his marriage up to the time of his recent departure for Geneva, but after the concoction of his villainous scheme, he had written for several hours steadily in this little volume, making lying entries which were intended to destroy every lingering trace of Beryl's love for him—should not Huplick have accomplished the work thoroughly.

Every page was full of references to her, her beauty, her sweetness, her wit—and her expected fortune. Then, under date of Geneva, upon the night of his flight from her, Conyers boldly avowed his rage and disappointment.

"I shall make sure that I get a rich wife of good birth next time," he wrote. "As for Beryl, I shall abandon her at once. As she is not my wife, she can't expect much money from me when we part. She'll have to go back to the Pension de Bassett and become a junior teacher. Now that her reputation is gone, England is no

place for her. She will have to bury herself somewhere on the Continent, change her name, and, if the Pension de Bassett won't receive her, she'll have to sew, or teach English, or sing at a café. In time, with her beauty, she'll get a husband, and so will end our pretty summer idyl on Lake Leman!"

There was more in similar strain. Beryl read it all, and burned the book upon her hearth to ashes.

The next morning she summoned Huplick to her in the little drawing-room.

She questioned him closely upon many points. The valet placed in her hands the early morning paper from Geneva, and she read for herself the account of Conyers's alleged death. Huplick explained that his master's name was misprinted, and declared that he should have the mistake corrected.

"I have no need of your services, Huplick," said the girl, at length, "and you can go to-day. You can have Mr. Conyers's clothes and all his effects. Everything—his money and all."

"But what shall you do, madam? You will need the money," suggested Huplick, anxiously.

"However much I may need it, I will never touch a penny of his money!" declared Beryl. "I do not yet know what I shall do. Do you know the names of any of Mr. Conyers's relatives or connections?"

"No, madam. He never told me."

"Now go."

"One word, madam. Permit me to inquire as to your future movements. Shall you apply at the Pension de Bassett for a refuge?"

"I have dismissed you," said Beryl.

She dismissed him with an imperious wave of the

hand, and he went from her presence. But he did not leave the house.

Beryl returned to her room. When Madame Pinnet sought her there about mid-day, she found the girl in bed, raving in the delirium of brain-fever.

CHAPTER VI.

ALONE.

The little household was speedily informed of the condition of its young mistress. Madame Pinnet remained in charge of the patient, while Huplick hurried to Lausanne for a doctor, returning with a very worthy Swiss practitioner who had studied in France.

Dr. Rozaud announced that the young girl was very ill, and the utmost care was requisite to promote her recovery, which he deemed exceedingly doubtful.

Beryl was very ill for weeks. Life and death battled in that little upper chamber for that wrecked young life, and it was life which won at last the victory. Upon the day on which the doctor proclaimed that the girl would live, Huplick, who had remained at the villa all this while, placed in the practitioner's hands the sum of fifty pounds—the little store which Beryl had refused—and said :

"That is all she has in the world. It was left her by Monsieur. Pay yourself out of this money, Doctor, and should anything be left, give it to the lady."

The doctor took possession of the money, and on the

same day Huplick departed. and was seen at the Villa Belvoir no more.

Beryl passed through all the weary stages of convalescence, and early in November was able to walk about the house.

"I take my leave of you to-day, madam," said the good Doctor Rozaud, as he came in one morning and found Beryl walking on the balcony wrapped in shawls —Beryl, indeed, but a wan, woeful Beryl, with thin face and great, burning eyes ; Beryl with her tawny wealth of hair all shorn, and with little rings of curls clustering about her small head. "You have need of me no longer."

"I am almost well again, Doctor, and am anxious to go away," said the girl, drearily. "We hired the house for only three months, and the time expires with the present month."

"Just so," said the doctor, sympathizingly. "This climate will not be good for you this winter. You do well to go away. Your serving-man placed in my hands fifty pounds of your money—"

"Which I beg you to keep, sir," said Beryl. "I have no need of it."

When he had taken his leave, well satisfied, Beryl called the housekeeper and went up-stairs with her. In the girl's dressing-room were *armoires* filled with clothing, which Dane Conyers had bought for her. There were costly dresses, trimmed with laces and embroideries, handsome shawls, a dressing-case, and a host of pretty trifles. There were a few jewels, also, not costly, but pretty, and of the value of several pounds. Beryl displayed these to Madame Pinnet.

"It's a splendid trousseau, Madame," said the housekeeper. "That embroidered black silk is too lovely.

And that reminds me. When you were so very ill, your boxes arrived from the Pension de Bassett. I had them put in the lumber-room."

"Send them here as soon as you go down," said Beryl. "Suzanne can help bring them. These jewels and the clothing, with the exception of the plain gold set and the thin dresses, are a present to you, Madame Pinnet, for your great kindness to me during my illness. I have no other way in which to show my gratitude or to reward you. The articles I have excepted are for Suzanne."

"Madame is more than generous; she is prodigal," said Madame Pinnet, delightedly. "But what will madame do for clothes for herself?"

"I have plenty in my old school-boxes," was the brief answer.

The pretty outfit which Dane Conyers had bought for his young bride was divided between its new proprietors, and carried away. Then the shabby old school-boxes were brought up, and Beryl was left to herself.

She remained a week longer at the Villa Belvoir, and then went away alone.

Dressed in a blue serge school-suit, a seal-skin jacket, cap and muff, and deeply veiled, she entered a first-class carriage of the railway train at Lausanne, on her way to Geneva.

On her arrival at Geneva, she drove to the Hotel de la Metropole, and registered her name as Miss Star.

Then, taking with her a few old-fashioned jewels which she had always cherished as having belonged to her mother—that mother whose very name was hateful to her now—she went out into the streets and sought a jeweler's shop on the Grand Quai du Lac, with the idea of disposing of them.

She had a large old-fashioned watch set with small diamonds, a brooch resembling a wheel, made also of small diamonds, eardrops, bracelets and a slender chain. The jeweler remarked upon the extremely small size and bad color of some of the jewels, the ancient fashion of all the articles, and finally offered fifty pounds for the whole.

Beryl accepted the offer without demur.

The weather was bad, the month being November, but Beryl had formed a project which must be carried out without regard to the season. The next day after her arrival at Geneva, she set out by slow stages for Zermatt.

Arrived at that little town, she made close inquiries after her truant husband ; visited the Riffel Inn, and questioned the waiters who had urged him to employ a guide. She was not well enough to climb Monte Rosa, even had the weather been good, which it was not. She had had no doubt of Huplick's story ; no hopes that her husband still lived ; she did not know why she had been so eager to visit the spot where he was declared to have lost his life ; but she was now satisfied, beyond all doubt, that Dane Conyers was dead.

She did not mention to any one her relationship to him, and went away a day or so later, returning to Geneva.

"And now," she said she to herself, drearily, "what am I to do ? Where shall I go ?"

She could not return to the Villa Belvoir, had she so wished, she having given up the little villa on leaving it.

She could not go to Mrs. and Miss Graham. They had been fair-weather friends, who had fallen away from her when the dreary storms had come upon her.

She thought of the Pension de Bassett. It was the only home she had ever known. Mrs. Bassett had filled the place of mother to her in about the same degree that a patent artificial incubator fills the place of a mother-hen to young chicklings. Beryl had been brought to Vevay, a mere babe of two years, by her uncle and a young Irish nurse. The latter had remained at the Pension with her young charge until Beryl was eight years of age, and all the tenderness and petting the girl had ever known had come from this Irish nurse. But the nurse had been sent back to her own country, and Beryl had taken her place among her fellow-pupils. Mrs. Bassett had not believed in "coddling children," as she expressed it.

"But she must have a heart," thought Beryl, in her loneliness and misery. "At any rate she will advise me. I will go to her, and ask her to tell me what to do."

In accordance with this resolve, she set out for Vevay by rail that very day, arriving at her destination, the Hotel Monnet, before evening.

As soon as the darkness began to fall, she put on her veil, and stole out of the hotel, making her way toward the Pension. Twenty minutes' brisk walk brought her to the well-remembered garden door in the high brick wall inclosing the school-grounds. She stood here a few seconds in a painful indecision, her pride urging her even now to beat a retreat, but her necessities were too urgent to permit her pride to conquer. With a sudden energy, she pulled the door-bell vigorously.

She heard the portress crossing the court-yard; heard the key grate in the lock, and the door swung open slowly. Beryl passed into the grounds with a swift and nervous movement.

She gave the portress a card upon which she had prevously written the name "Beryl." The woman did not seem to recognize the veiled figure, and locked the garden-door and led the way to the house.

There was a light in the drawing-room in a wing at the right of the house, and other lights in the refectory, where the pupils spent their evenings with their governesses, in a wing at the left side of the building. The main edifice was dark and silent.

The portress, after a scrutinizing glance at the attire of the young visitor, ushered her into the drawing-room, and departed in quest of Mrs. Bassett. Beryl's heart began to throb violently.

"How will she receive me?" she said to herself. "If she turns me away in her anger, what is to become of me?"

CHAPTER VII.

MARRIED DRAGONS.

Beryl was kept waiting nearly half an hour in the drawing-room of the Pension de Bassett. Her anxiety had become almost insupportable, when the door opened and Mrs. Bassett swept into the room followed by her husband. He was angular, solemn of visage and wearing a portentous frown.

Mrs. Bassett was a woman of large and heavy frame, with a big red face and double chin, framed in gray corkscrew curls. She was dressed in a purple silk gown, with a train, and wore a lace cap with yellow ribbons. She carried herself with an air of majesty, was pompous, severe and judicial. She was, in fact, commandant of the establishment, the Reverend Edward being her aide-de-camp.

Beryl arose at the entrance of this couple, and advanced a few paces, throwing back her veil, and disclosing a pale, thin, anxious face, worn by illness and grief, and a pair of imploring brown eyes, piteous in their beseeching. She held out her thin hand.

But Mrs. Bassett drew back as if fearing contamination, and said, stiffly :

"I received your card, madam, at the hands of my portress. Permit me to say that I am quite at a loss to understand your presence here, after all that has occurred."

"After all that has occurred!" repeated the reverend gentleman, severely.

The girl's hand fell to her side. She tried to speak, but her lips quivered, and she could not command her voice.

"You brought a great deal of trouble upon us, madam, by your elopement with an adventurer," continued Mrs. Bassett, with virtuous severity. "You might have ruined the reputation of my house. As it is, one pupil was withdrawn by her parents, who feared your evil example might be contagious. Other parents have written us, urging us to guard our pupils more closely —as if girls were ever kept more secluded than these innocent vestals of my household! You abused our trust; you have proved yourself base and unworthy!"

"Utterly base and unworthy," said Mrs. Bassett's marital echo, with a deepening frown.

Mrs. Bassett throned herself in a large chair. Beryl sank into the nearest seat, weak and trembling.

"I hear," said Mrs. Bassett, "that the retribution which overtakes the guilty, sooner or later, has overtaken you. I have told as much of your terrible story as is consistent with delicacy to my pupils, holding you up to them as an example of the results of disobedience. I am told by one of my governesses, Mademoiselle Bartol, who has a sister engaged as under-teacher in a school at Lausanne, that one Doctor Rozaud, who practices there, has told that your husband is dead. Is this story true?"

"Yes, madam, he is dead."

"Strange retribution!" breathed Mrs. Bassett.

"Striking retribution!" murmured Mr. Bassett.

"Sticken down in his sin!" said Mrs. Bassett. "Cut off in his youth like an unprofitable fig tree. I have

heard, too, through Mademoiselle Bartol, that 'Conyers' was but an assumed name, and that the man calling himself 'Conyers' had a wife in England, and that you had no right to bear any other than your maiden name. I see you don't wear mourning for him. That shows that a faint idea of respectability lingers with you. It shows, also, that you do not consider yourself his widow. If he married you under his assumed name, you are not his widow. You are neither maid, wife nor widow! What are you?"

"A girl who has been bitterly wronged, who has nearly lost all her faith in God and humanity! A girl who stands utterly friendless and homeless in the world, and who has come to you for advice. You are the only protectors my childhood knew. You are the only parents I ever had. Will you not pity me, erring and unfortunate as I am, and help me?"

She looked at Mrs. Bassett with pleading eyes whose eagerness was pitiful.

That lady puffed herself up importantly, and answered:

"I am surprised that you should come to us whose confidence you so terribly outraged. It is like the story of the prodigal son in the Scriptures. But we are not your parents, miss. We owe a duty to ourselves and the innocent beings in our charge. We cannot take you back into our pure home to contaminate our pupils. No, miss, when you passed out of this paradise, the angel with the flaming sword took up his position at our humble gate. There can be no re-entrance for you."

"Positively no re-entrance!" said Mr. Bassett.

"I do not ask to take my former place as your pupil. I realize that my past is dead beyond resurrection. But will you not assist me to procure a situation as a

governess? Your recommendation would enable me to find a position at Geneva or Villeneuve."

"You ask an impossibility," replied Mrs. Bassett, coldly. "What! Shall I recommend as a teacher of innocent youth a girl with a history like yours? I will not incur such risks, for your true character would sooner or later be discovered, and you would stand revealed as a girl who had been no legal wife, while thinking yourself such—as the girl who had eloped from a school of the very highest character, with a low adventurer."

"With an adventurer!' echoed Mr. Bassett.

"Will you tell me what to do, Mrs. Bassett?" asked the girl, desperately. "I am well qualified to teach, but without recommendation I cannot hope to secure a situation. Can a girl like me find sewing to do? Can I get a place as lady's maid without recommendation?"

Mrs. Bassett shook her head. Mr. Bassett employed the same gesture to express also his stern negative.

"What remains to me? Perhaps it will come to that at last I shall do as he bade me—sing at the *cafés*," and her tone was full of intense bitterness. "I sha'n't need references for that."

Mrs. Bassett looked her horror.

"I can hardly believe that you are the innocent girl of last term," she said severely. "The descent of the downward path is indeed easy. Was it your adventurer companion who urged you to sing in the *cafés?* You seem to take kindly to the idea. Pause, misguided girl, upon the brink of perdition. Stop where you are."

"Another step," murmured Mr. Bassett, "may precipitate you into the black gulfs of endless woe."

"Shall I starve?" demanded Beryl, defiantly, her eyes flashing stormily. "Is there no honest way in which I

can earn my bread? I would have been glad to die, but I could not die. I cannot destroy my own life. How shall I sustain it? Because I have been foully wronged, is there no place for me on earth—no roof to shelter me?"

Mrs. Bassett looked appalled at this outburst.

"I think that meekness and a humble and crushed spirit would better become you, miss!" she ejaculated. "What right have you to expect anything whatever after what you have done? We can do nothing for you—nothing whatever. We sent your luggage to you, and therewith washed our hands of you, wretched girl."

"Most unhappy girl!" murmured Mr. Bassett.

Beryl arose to her feet with a haughty movement.

"You know how ignorant I am of the world," she said, striving to speak calmly. "Have you no word of advice for me? Will you not tell me where to go?"

"Where should you go but to your kindred?" demanded Mrs. Bassett. "Go to your uncle, whom you have justly offended. Go, kneel at his feet, and implore his pardon. He will, to screen your shortcomings from the world, no doubt provide for you."

"Yes," echoed Mr. Bassett; "go to England."

Mrs. Bassett rose up, ponderous, important—a Roman matron. She delivered herself:

"We will not detain you longer. In your future life, whatever its vicissitudes, we beg you to refrain from mentioning that you were educated at the Pension de Bassett."

Despite all that she had suffered, Beryl's old nature flashed up under these gratuitous insults. She smiled bitterly, and made a mocking, sweeping courtesy, exclaiming:

"Rest assured, madam, that I am as ashamed of my

instructors as they can be of me. Allow me to bid you good evening."

She swept to the door like a young empress, haughty, imperious and outwardly cool, leaving Mr. and Mrs, Bassett transfixed with astonishment.

When she undressed herself for bed, she did what she had never done before—knelt and prayed for help and comfort from above. She had said her prayers every night of her life, but now in truth she prayed. She arose from her knees with a vague sense of comfort, and crept into bed.

But she did not sleep. For hours she reviewed the events of her brief life; for hours she tossed on her pillow, considering one plan after another.

The next morning she arose early. She discovered that she had time to catch the morning express-train to Geneva, and made all haste to do so. From Geneva, where she spent the day in a little upper room at the Hotel de la Metropole, she took the evening express-train for Paris by way of Lyons, and spent the night in wakeful thought, watching the sparks as they drifted back from the engine in the darkness, and planning out her future in case her uncle should not receive her.

She had been hopeless, bitter and despairing ever since her heavy troubles had fallen upon her. She was bitter still and without hope, but as she journeyed on through the night, a strange courage came to her; her soul rose up strong and brave to meet her future. She was only sixteen; surely she had not lived out her life. There must be something good in store for her whose whole happiness had been so brief, whose griefs had been so terrible.

Beryl arrived at London in the evening, two days later, spending the night at a private hotel. The next

morning dawned with a drizzling rain, and proved to be the beginning of one of those gray, dreary, cheerless November days that are found nowhere in all the world so cheerless as in England. She took an early train to Guilford, in Surrey, the station nearest her uncle's residence. She had left her boxes at the Euston Square station, and had only a hand-bag as she alighted at Guilford and engaged a "fly" to convey her to her journey's end.

"Do you know Starwood?" she inquired of the flyman. "I wish to go there."

"It is five miles out," said the driver. "I know the place as well as I know Guilford. Have you there in 'arf an hour, miss."

Beryl entered the vehicle, the driver mounted his box, and she was presently being borne at a good rate of speed toward her uncle's residence. She would have given much to know what reception would be accorded her.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE 20TH OF OCTOBER.

Upon one of the wildest, boldest bluffs on the West Cornish coast, between Pendeen Cove and Gurnard's Head, in the very teeth of the great Atlantic gales, stands a stern and gray old castle known as Hawks' Cliff. It is the ancestral seat of the Earls of Hawkhurst. The castle, a noble pile of vast extent, with towers, turrets and battlements, has two ornamental fronts, one facing seaward, the other looking out upon velvety lawns, elaborate gardens, a grand old park and a broad and winding carriage-drive, which descended gently to the highway below and two miles distant.

The present Earl of Hawkhurst had, very early in life, during the lifetime of his father, the late earl, married a lady of high birth—Lady Portia Marly, the daughter of an earl, but she had died years afterward, childless. He was now only fifty years of age. His favorite nephews, one of whom had been his heir-apparent, had recently perished together in a yachting excursion off the coast of Norway, as he had written to Dane Conyers. Conyers was the next in order of succession to the title, but the heir of the Hawkhurst wealth remained to be chosen by its present possessor.

Conyers and Desmond, although his kindred, he had never seen. There had never seemed the faintest possibility that either of them would be his heir, and the earl

had scarcely known until recently of their existence. Conyers was the son of a second cousin, whom his lordship had especially disliked, and who had changed his own name of Desmond to that of Conyers upon his marriage with an heiress of the latter family name. Noble Desmond, who stood to him in an even less degree of relationship, had lost his parents in childhood, and had since resided with a guardian in the north of England.

The 20th of October was the date he had appointed for the arrival of the two young gentlemen at Hawks' Cliff. Upon the morning of that day, a carriage had been sent to Penzance, there being a possibility that one of the young men, at least, might arrive by the early train.

Neither of them made an appearance, however, and the carriage remained at Penzance, in accordance with the earl's directions, to await the later trains.

At a late hour of the afternoon, the earl stood at a wide casement-window of his great library, looking out upon the sea.

He was a man of gigantic figure, with brawny chest, powerful arms, and an appearance of boundless vitality. He looked like one of the grand old vikings of the Norse legends, with his rough-hewn features, his great, massive head, covered with a dense growth of fiery-red hair, his frosty blue eyes, with lightning gleams in them, his ruddy complexion, and his long beard, which fell upon his breast in a mass. A man of fierce will, strong passions, choleric, vindictive, ill-tempered, yet, withal, brave and generous—such was Gray Desmond, tenth Earl of Hawkhurst.

A sudden impatience seized upon him. He jerked a bell-pull near at hand. A moment later, a gray-haired serving-man, dressed in black, entered the room.

"Has the carriage come yet?" demanded the earl, in a resonant voice, without turning his head from the window.

"No, my Lord."

"It is time, if my guests arrived on the afternoon train. It will probably be here very soon. Let the young gentlemen be shown up to their rooms immediately upon their arrival, before coming to me. As soon as they arrive you may tell me."

Some fifteen minutes later there was a low knock upon the door, and the servant re-appeared.

"If you please, my Lord," he said, bowing low, "the carriage has arrived, with Mr. Conyers."

"Humph!" muttered the earl, in a tone of dissatisfaction. "Show him in here when he comes down from his room."

The servant went out, and the earl drummed his fingers restlessly upon the broad sheet of plate-glass forming the upper half of the window.

"Of course the Conyers-Desmond would arrive first," he said to himself. "If he's like his father, he'll be as prompt as a jackal at a feast. But the son may not resemble the father. I won't judge him beforehand. There may be a streak of good in him. He shall have a fair chance, and so shall Noble Desmond. I should like one of my own race to inherit the Desmond property. Ah!" he added, with a fierce catching of his breath and a sudden convulsion of his features, "if it had not been for my own accursed pride and devilish temper, I might, perhaps, have had children of my own to inherit my title and wealth. Men call me successful, a marked man, one of the foremost men of my time, and all that; but I would give all my empty honors to be able to transmit what I own to the offspring of my own loins; to hear a

voice calling me 'Father;' to feel that, when I am gone, one whom I had called into being would weep for me. Bah! I am growing childish."

There was a tremulous quiver of his full, stern lips, but the next moment they had resumed their usual calm repose.

He turned, as steps were heard in the corridor without, and the door was flung open, giving admittance to Dane Conyers.

"Mr. Rollyn Conyers," announced the servant, that being the name the visitor had given him.

The door closed, and Conyers came forward, in a full dinner dress, dark and handsome, his inky black eyes glittering, a smile upon his beardless mouth. He had shaved off his mustache and whiskers, it will be remembered, and he had never looked to better advantage than now.

The earl stood immovable in the full glow that came through the casement, and the lightning gleams from his frosty eyes seemed almost to pierce to the young man's heart. It was to Conyers's signal advantage that he did not resemble his father. It was even more to his advantage that he could assume such a look of pleasant frankness as now lit up his features.

The earl extended his hand; Conyers clasped it, not too fervently, but with respectful warmth.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Conyers," said Lord Hawkhurst in his stately manner. "I was not sure that my letter would reach you. My steward delivered it to your bankers in London, who said that you were somewhere upon the Continent."

"I was in Italy," said Conyers. "I had been making a summer tour through the Austrian Tyrol, and was making my way home. I was much shocked to learn of the

tragic death of your nephews, my Lord, although I fear I may not possess sufficient delicacy to offer my condolences in a proper manner."

"Humph!" said the earl. "Pray be seated, Mr. Conyers. I have a few questions to ask you, substantially the same as those I wrote in my letter. Your presence here might be deemed sufficient answer; yet I have too much at stake not to thoroughly assure myself upon certain points which I have at heart."

Conyers took the seat indicated to him. The earl seated himself also, leaning one arm upon a writing-table.

"I sufficiently explained my reasons, and need not therefore go into detail in regard to them," said Lord Hawkhurst. "I have seen enough of unequal marriages, and do not approve of them," and he frowned darkly. "No low-born woman shall ever rule at Hawks' Cliff. He who inherits my wealth must allow me to select the woman who shall reign here when I am gone. Are you married?"

The question came abruptly, like an unexpected douche of cold water. Conyers started, and his face paled a little; but he answered promptly and with a careless laugh:

"No, my Lord. I am but three-and-twenty, and have not yet thought of love or marriage."

"Humph!" said the earl. "You are fortunate to have escaped marriage. You are not even engaged to marry?"

"I am not even engaged," replied Conyers.

"That is well. I have my eyes upon a young lady, titled and an heiress, whose estates I desire to unite to the greater ones of Hawkhurst. Shall you be willing to see her, prepared to like her, and to marry her?"

Again the dark face of Dane Conyers paled, but he answered in a firm voice, with a thought, perhaps, of his beautiful young wife and her wrongs :

"When I came here, my Lord, at your summons, I came heart-free and hand-free, resolving to try and fill to you the place of your lost nephew. I shall endeavor to conform my will to yours. I feel assured that any alliance you would propose to me would be eminently suitable for me, and I only await an introduction to the lady to enter the lists as her suitor."

"Humph ! neatly said," declared the earl, and yet he did not look altogether delighted, as he probably ought to have done. Possibly, tyrannical as he sometimes was, he liked a little independence in other people occasionally, and was apt to suspect his worshipers of sycophancy.

At this point the door opened, after a preliminary knock, and the servant announced :

"Mr. Noble Desmond."

The earl arose to receive him.

Mr. Desmond was in full dinner dress, like Conyers, but a greater contrast to Beryl's husband could not have been imagined.

He was a fair young fellow with an indolent air that partook of effeminacy. He was tall, with a stalwart frame that was undeniably graceful. He was furthermore high-bred, with a courtesy that seemed to be no mere outward polish, but an outcome of a generous and courteous nature. With his gray eyes, brown hair and silky mustache, he might have been called handsome.

"I hardly know what to make of him," thought the earl, puzzled by Desmond's graceful indolence. "I fancy I shall like Conyers best."

The earl gave the new-comer a gracious welcome, and

exchanged the usual greetings with him. The little clock on the mantel-piece chimed the half-hour past six. Half an hour still remained before dinner. The sunset glow had faded from the west, and the room was filling with shadows. Lord Hawkhurst rang for lights; the curtains were drawn, and a cheery glow came from the two grate-fires, one at each end of the room.

"How did you come from Penzance, Desmond?" inquired the earl, when he found himself again alone with his guests. "How was it you missed the Hawkhurst carriage?"

"I arrived at Penzance in a friend's yacht, and just after the Hawkhurst carriage had left," replied Desmond. "I came over in a fly."

"You have been yachting, then?"

"Yes, my Lord, for the last month, with a party of friends."

"Are you rich?"

"No, my Lord. I have three hundred pounds a year, left me by my father; that is all," said Desmond. "I am trying to study law."

"Humph?" said the earl. "Three hundred a year!—clerk's hire! Should think you'd have to do something. I suppose you will give up studying law now, and try to get a living out of me. I asked you certain questions in my letter, to which your presence here would appear a sufficient answer. I have just made this remark to Conyers, and have questioned him yet more closely, as I shall question you. In a case like this, one cannot be too careful. I am not one to build upon untried ground. As you have come here, it mnst be with intent to please me. Are you married?"

"No, my Lord," answered Desmond, with a smile.

He was but two-and-twenty years of age—a year younger than Conyers.

"Are you engaged to be married?"

Desmond replied in the negative.

"Are you heart-free?"

The answer was in an affirmative.

"I shall claim the privilege of choosing the wife of my heir," said the earl. "I know a young heiress of noble birth, whom I desire shall be mistress here when I am gone. Conyers is willing to enter the lists as her suitor. What do you say?"

"I say," said Desmond, his face flushing, "that I desire to select my own wife—with all deference to your judgment, my Lord. Marriage is something too sacred to be managed as a mere matter of business. I believe in love, although I know nothing of it by experience. I will meet your young friend, my lord, and treat her with courtesy; I could not do otherwise. If I should love her, I would try to win her. If I should not love her, I doubt whether all the world could tempt me to marry her."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MISTRESS OF CRAGTHORPE.

During the weeks immediately subsequent to the arrival of his two young kinsmen at Hawks' Cliff, the earl entertained them with a hospitality that was almost princely. He placed thoroughbred horses at their disposal; he enjoined them to use at their pleasure his handsome yacht, which was kept at anchor in the bay below; every facility for hunting over his lordship's preserves was afforded them, and the vast resources of entertainment within the castle were all open to them without reserve.

At the end of the month, so impartial was the manner of the earl, that it was impossible to guess at his conclusions regarding the young gentlemen—if, indeed, he had yet arrived at any conclusion; but Conyers, sharp sighted as a lynx, believed himself the earl's favorite and his predestined heir.

Conyers had cause for this belief. He had sacrificed his honor, his affection for Beryl, and all the best instincts of his nature, to win the glittering prize of the earl's wealth; and, having done so much, nothing remained that he would not do. He was compliant almost to servility. His views upon all subjects were found to conform to those of the earl; he proved himself an appreciative listener, and though he was too wise to flatter his august relative, yet his manner toward the earl was always marked by a graceful, deferential and pro-

found respect that constituted the subtlest form of flattery. He made himself familiar with Lord Hawkhurst's political career, studied his speeches, echoed his prejudices, and was enthusiastic in favor of whatsoever the earl liked.

Desmond was also deferential in his manner toward his titled kinsman ; he also strove to win the earl's favor, but he seemed to be a man of principle instead of impulse—as was Conyers—and he was seldom false to his own convictions of justice. Sometimes, when called upon, he expressed, in a respectful manner, opinions directly contrary to those of the earl, who, impatient of contradiction, displayed an anger that was unreasoning.

During these weeks, Conyers received several letters from his valet at Lausanne. He was kept informed of the progress of Beryl's dangerous illness.

One morning in November, Lord Hawkhurst invited the young gentlemen into his library, and something in his manner declared to them that he was about to make to them a communication of importance.

The morning was unusually clear and bright for the season, with cool, crisp air, and sunlight on sea and shore. Sea-coal fires glowed and flamed in the grates ; the wide projecting windows were all unshuttered, letting in floods of light ; and the roar of the impatient sea, as it lashed itself against the rocks at the base of the castle hundreds of feet below, had strange music.

The earl had preceded his guests by several moments, and was standing before the fire, his red hair and beard glowing like flames in the fire-light, his figure overflowing with strength, his ruddy face, rough-hewn and massive, instinct with power and a rugged grandeur, his cold eyes full of gleams. He looked every inch the grand old viking.

"Be seated, young gentlemen," he said, inclining his head. "I suppose it is unnecessary to remind you that you have been here a month to-day. This is the 20th of November."

Noble Desmond bowed gravely, and sat down at a writing-table near at hand. Dane Conyers took possession of a luxurious lounging-chair.

"Possibly you expect me to announce my decision between you this morning and proclaim one of you my heir," continued Lord Hawkhurst. "If so, I must disappoint you. I am not yet prepared to choose between you. You are both of my blood, and I do not wish to decide so important a matter as this of the Hawkhurst inheritance without due care and thought. I should like to study you both more at length. I trust you are not tired of Hawks' Cliff, and are not lonely here. How much longer can you remain?"

"As for me," said Conyers, with a suave smile, "I can remain until you are tired of me, my Lord. I shall be delighted to share your hospitality."

"You, Desmond?"

Desmond's fair face flushed, as he answered, with his usual indolence, but with underlying gravity:

"I am not an idle fellow, my Lord, and I cannot promise to remain indefinitely. I am reading law, and I must return to town by the 1st of December."

"Remain at least until January," said Lord Hawkhurst. "Come, come, Desmond. Don't knit your brows in that fashion. I am not used to being denied, and I wont take a denial. If you cannot gratify me in one thing, how can you reasonably expect me to do very much for you?"

"I am willing to do anything I can to gratify you, my Lord," said Desmond. "Since you desire it, I will

remain at Hawks' Cliff until January ; but in that case I must go up to town this week for a day or two on business. I had not arranged to stay away so long."

"Go to-morrow," said the earl. "The sooner you go, the sooner you'll return. I have something in hand for to-day. I have a call to make this morning, and I desire you and Conyers to accompany me."

The two young men exchanged glances.

"Shall you go to Penzance, my Lord ?" inquired Conyers.

"No—to Cragthorpe, a country-seat, some seven miles distance from Hawks' Cliff," replied the earl. "It is a fine old estate, with a long rent-roll, and belongs to a girl not more than twenty years old, Miss Octavia Windsor. She returned yesterday from the Continent, where she has summered with her friends. She will probaby go up to town in January. I have not seen her in months, and my acquaintance with her is extremely limited, but I desire to pay my respects to her at the earliest possible moment."

"Is she the young lady to whom you alluded upon the day of our arrival at Hawks' Cliff, my Lord ?" asked Conyers. "I think you spoke of that young lady as being an especial favorite of yours."

"Well, what is to hinder Miss Windsor's being my especial favorite ?" demanded Lord Hawkhurst. "I do not know her very well, personally, but I know her family, root and branch, stock and stem. A fine old family—as fine as any in Cornwall. Her father was my most intimate friend in boyhood and early manhood. We were like twin brothers—second editions of Damon and Pythias. I was fierce, passionate and revengeful ; he was a pale, gentle, student sort of a fellow, as refined as a woman. We married sisters—that was eight-and-

twenty years ago," and the earl sighed. "I married Lady Portia Marly, and he married Lady Octavia Marly. My poor wife died a year after our marriage, leaving no children. Lady Octavia lived many years and bore several children, of whom but this one survives. Lady Octavia is dead, and Windsor is dead; and this girl, Octavia, is mistress of Cragthorpe. She was educated in France, her mother's relatives having charge of her."

"And she is a great heiress," said Conyers, musingly. "Do the Windsor estates devolve to the distaff line, my Lord?"

"In default of male heirs," replied the earl. "There was a nephew, a cousin of Octavia, and son of a younger brother of my friend who was brought up as the heir; who was the heir, in fact; but he was of a roving disposition, and went off to the antipodes three or four years ago and died there. The estate was strictly entailed, unlike mine, and while her cousin lived, Octavia's fortune was respectable, nothing more. His death has made her a person of great wealth and importance. There is nothing on earth would give me so much pleasure as to know that my friend Windsor's daughter would some day be mistress of Hawks' Cliff, and that these two great estates of Hawks' Cliff and Cragthorpe would some day be merged into one. I have information that Miss Windsor is heart-free. If one of you should become her successful suitor, that one would stand immeasurably the better chance of becoming my heir."

Half an hour later, Lord Hawkhurst and his guests set out on their visit.

Cragthorpe was a handsome mansion of large extent and considerable architectural pretension, situated

seven miles distant from the bold headland crowned by Hawks' Cliff Castle, and down the coast. It stood upon a level sweep of green lawn, in the indentation of a small bay known as Craghaven, and to the eastward of the dwelling lay the park, the woods and the farms that made up the estate.

At the moment in which the Earl of Hawkhurst and his young kinsmen set out to pay their morning call at Cragthorpe, its young mistress was walking to and fro in the pale November sunshine upon the grassy terrace in front of her dwelling.

She was a tall, handsome girl, with a figure generally designated as "fine," being large and well-rounded, approaching heaviness. She moved with well-bred indolence and with tutored grace. Her hair and eyes were of a bright black hue, while her complexion was very fair. Her cheeks were of a vivid crimson, which seldom varied in its intensity of coloring.

She was dressed in an elaborate morning-costume of olive-brown cashmere, and wore a silver-fox fur jacket and a jaunty cap of the same material.

The house-door opened, and a gentleman came hurrying toward her. The new-comer was of short stature, small of figure, and past middle age. His hair was parted in the middle, and he wore whiskers of a sandy color, which flowed back over his shoulders. He was a withered, insignificant, elderly dandy, but he was also Miss Windsor's maternal uncle—having been half-brother of her mother—and the young lady's personal guardian as well.

This was Mr. Griffin Callender—Lady Marly, the grandmother of Miss Windsor, having been twice married, her first husband having been the Honorable Griffin Callender, and her second spouse having been the

late Earl of Marly. The sole issue of Lady Marly's first marriage had been the gentleman we now introduce to the reader.

"Sorry not to meet you at breakfast, Octavia," he said, in a drawling voice, as he neared his ward. "Have the letters come yet?"

"No, it is a long, hard ride to Penzance over these ugly roads, and the post-bag hasn't arrived yet," replied Miss Windsor. "I came out to wait for it. The dullness of this place begins to oppress me. So you went to Hawks' Cliff last evening? Did you see the earl?"

"Yes, and he asked after you with a great deal of interest, and even with affection," said Mr. Callender. "I saw him alone in his library, but he has guests at Hawks' Cliff, whom I did not see."

"Guests?"

"Two young gentlemen, one of whom will inherit his property in due course of time," said Mr. Callender. "They're kinsmen of his, not very near, of course, but blood's thicker than water, you know. He invited them to Hawks' Cliff, with the intention of making one of them his heir."

"Indeed!" said Miss Windsor, interested. "Who are the young men?"

"One is Rollyn Conyers, so the earl called him, son of the Desmond who married an heiress named Conyers, and changed his name to please her. This Rollyn Conyers will inherit the title; that can't be diverted from him. The other is a young fellow who is reading law in London, a Desmond, poorer than Conyers. His name is Noble Desmond. The earl told me all about them. It is his ambition that one of them should marry you."

"Me!" said Miss Windsor. "What an idea!"

"It is the earl's ambition to unite Hawks' Cliff and Cragthorpe," said Mr. Callender, "and it's a mighty pretty idea, Octavia. Think what a vast domain the union would make! You'd be a sort of queen, Octy, and live in royal state."

"I can marry whom I please," said Miss Windsor, tossing her head. "With Cragthorpe as my dower, I might marry a duke."

"Lord Hawkhurst can leave the property to whom he pleases," declared Mr. Callender. "It is odd, almost unparalleled, to find such vast estates unentailed, but these can be willed to whomsoever the earl pleases. And he may not please to leave them to Conyers, along with the title, though I presume he will do so. He would naturally leave the property to support the title."

"Of course," assented Miss Windsor, "Conyers will get estates, money and title. The other young man wastes his time at Hawks' Cliff."

"The earl is coming over this morning, with the young gentlemen, to call upon you," said Mr. Callender. "Don't fall in love with Desmond, Octy. And—but here comes the post-bag."

A servant came riding up the avenue as he spoke. Mr. Callender went down the terrace to meet him, and returned with the post-bag, which he unlocked with a key drawn from his pocket.

There were several letters for Miss Windsor, with Continental post-marks, and there was a single letter for Mr. Callender.

Callender read his in silence, and then sank to a seat on the stone balustrade of the terrace, his face ghastly pale, his eyes starting, his jaw dropped, his entire countenance that of one upon whom a terrible blow has fallen.

"What is the matter, Uncle Griffin?" demanded Miss Windsor. "You look absolutely horrified. Is any one ill? Is any one dead.?"

Callender aroused himself from his stupor, and with a great effort put on a seeming of calmness.

"No one is dead," he said, hoarsely, "and that is where the trouble is. Octavia, prepare yourself for an awful blow. After all, it's worse for you than me—poor girl!"

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

"Can you bear the truth, Octy?" he asked, huskily. "I don't know how to break it to you. Your—uncle Windsor is alive!"

"Alive! Uncle Windsor! What madness!"

"It's true, Octavia! This letter is from him!"

"I don't believe it—I won't believe it!" cried Miss Windsor, in a gust of passionate defiance. "It is rank imposture. He was lost at sea years ago! I know my uncle's handwriting. Give me that letter!"

The young lady made a spring forward and snatched the letter from her uncle's hand. Her black eyes scanned it in a burning gaze. The letters swam before her eyes, yet even in her agitation she recognized the peculiar crabbed penmanship that had once been so familiar to her.

"It—it looks like his handwriting," she muttered. "But it's a forgery. It's dated Canada. He says—I can't read it, Uncle Griffin."

The letter dropped from her nerveless hands, and she leaned heavily against a tall marble urn, across which a few dead vines were trailing.

Mr. Callender picked up the letter.

"It's all true," he said, "and it's hard for you, Octy—for you and for me. They said Tom was on the *Tas-*

manian when she was lost in the Indian Ocean, and it is true that he paid his passage in her; but I always thought it just possible that he might have changed his mind at the last moment, and stayed behind. And it seems that that was the case. He says he has roamed the world over, and that only recently he heard of his brother's death. He will return in January, to enter into his new possessions, and he adds that you shall have a home at Cragthorpe until your marriage. There is a postscript, in which he says that if a certain young lady whom he knew years ago, has proved faithful to him, he will soon bring a new mistress to Cragthorpe."

Octavia Windsor's face flamed with a sudden horror and despair.

"A new mistress—and but now I was mistress here!" she exclaimed. "Oh, this is horrible! To be set aside as the unimportant niece, the dependent, the—oh, uncle Griffin! What shall I do? I, who hoped to make such a grand marriage! I— It is like a dream!"

"There'll be no grand marriage for you now, Octy," said her uncle. "You will marry some poor scion of nobility, perhaps, or an army officer, or a government clerk, or you'll live an old maid and nurse your uncle's children, and play the piano at your aunt-in-law's brilliant parties, and grow crochety and be ill-dressed, and—"

"Never! never!" ejaculated Miss Windsor, furiously, her soul stirred to a tempest of anger. "How dare you talk so to me? I'd rather die. Yet, what am I to do?" she added, her fury giving place to despair. "When my uncle returns, I shall have no chance to contract a brilliant marriage."

"He'll not return until January. We will tell no one that he lives. I think he will not announce his return

to any one but ourselves. You have six weeks. In those six weeks you must secure a rich husband."

"That's all very well," scoffed Miss Windsor, "but where am I to pick up a rich husband on such short notice, and how am I to marry him in such haste?"

"This Rollyn Conyers will be the next Earl of Hawkhurst," said Mr. Callender, thoughtfully. "Marry him. You can captivate him if you try. You can be fascinating, Octavia, and you are a fine, handsome creature—"

"Bah! As if I were a prize cow! As to this Conyers, how am I to know that Conyers will inherit Hawks' Cliff?"

"Oh, Conyers is sure to inherit all that the earl has. Lord Hawkhurst told me last night that he should like the title and estates to keep together. He said, too, that he desired above all things that his old friend Windsor's daughter should be mistress of Hawks' Cliff. Marry Conyers, Octavia, and marry him at once. He is sure to be the earl's heir."

"I think so, too," said the girl, thoughtfully. "I will marry Conyers, Uncle Griffin, and I'll make him fall in love with me this very day. But we shall have to make a stolen marriage, I fear, else I shall not be able to marry him at all before Uncle Windsor returns. I can't have any six months' engagement, with bridesmaids and a costly trousseau and a grand wedding at St. George's. Burn that letter, Uncle Griffin, and forget its contents. I will proceed to make my hay while the sun shines. In less than one month I shall be Mrs. Rollyn Conyers."

Her uncle warmly expressed his approval.

"You will succeed!" he exclaimed. "You must succeed! I—there's some one at the lodge gates, Octavia. The earl, with his kinsmen! Run to your

room, and then go down to the drawing-room. I will receive our guests."

Miss Windsor flitted away like a shadow, entering the house. Mr. Callender tore his crumpled letter into minute pieces as he crossed the terrace, ascended the steps and entered the drawing-room. He dropped the scraps of paper into the glowing grate, and they shriveled away in the flame as the footman opened the door, announcing the Earl of Hawkhurst, Mr. Conyers and Mr. Desmond.

CHAPTER X.

STARWOOD.

Starwood was a roomy old red brick-house, of the Tudor style of architecture, with many features to redeem it from absolute plainness.

The estate consisted of one large farm, which was cultivated by its owner, Mr. William Star, the uncle of Beryl, a bachelor, who lived alone with his servants, working as hard as they, and was regarded by his neighbors as a recluse. He never visited, never received guests, was unsocial to moroseness, was rigid, self-repressed, and unsmiling—more, in fact, a stone-image than a living, breathing human being.

Upon the day in which Beryl set out from London to visit this home of her ancestors, the cold November rain was falling in a ceaseless drizzle, the sky was dark and lowering, the earth sodden, and an unutterable dreariness and gloom brooded heavily over the earth.

In his sitting-room at Starwood, Mr. Star sat at a tall old desk, looking over books of accounts. Presently, he arose, and looked out for some moments into the dense surrounding shubbery, and then his gaze wandered to the wide avenue of only a few rods in length which connected the house with the public road. The wide carriage-gates were open, and a cab was just entering his grounds.

The vehicle drew up at the stone porch. A slender young girl, in a blue serge dress, descended, entered the porch, and rang the knocker.

Mr. Star heard the house-door open and close again. Then his housekeeper, a withered woman who had lived in his father's family long before his birth, and who managed his household for him, knocked at the sitting-room door, and immediately entered, with a look of keen agitation upon her sallow features.

"Mr. Star, if you please, sir," said the old woman, tremulously, a strange excitement brightening her dull old eyes, "there's a young lady wishes to see you."

"Who is she?" demanded Mr. Star. "What's her name? What does she want here?"

"I don't know, sir," said the old woman, replying to her master's latest question. "I'll show her in, and she can tell you herself."

She slipped out hurriedly, as if to avoid further questioning, and ushered Beryl into the room.

The old housekeeper remained outside in the hall in close proximity to the key-hole, her sharpened features working agitatedly, her eyes and ears attentive to what transpired within the sitting-room.

Beryl's first movement was to fling back her veil, revealing her pale, thin face, crowned with red-bronze rings of hair, and lit up by great bronze-brown eyes,

now full of a strange pleading. Its bright young beauty, its sadness and wistful yearning might well have moved as stern a soul as that of Mr. Star, but he recoiled from Beryl as if she had displayed a Gorgon's head. He recognized her at once, yet could scarcely believe in her identity.

"Are you Mr. William Star?" asked Beryl, in her low voice, now tremulous, recognizing him also, and scarcely knowing what she said.

"Who are you, girl?" demanded the farmer.

"I am your niece, Beryl Star."

Beryl stood, still with that look of pleading in her face. Mr. Star uttered a strange sound, half cry, half groan, and his mouth twitched at the corners and his dark face grew white. She shrank before the hardness of his eyes, the grim sternness that hardened all his features.

"You mistake," he said, coldly. "I have no niece. You have no claims upon me, madam."

"I know I have no claims upon your protection, sir—no legal claim—but humanity gives every human being a claim upon other human beings. I am not come to beg, sir. I shall go away presently as quietly as I have come, but first I have a few questions to ask of you, for which purpose I have come here from Switerland."

"If you had possessed any womanly delicacy, you would not come here after receiving the letter I sent you some weeks since."

A faint color drifted into the girl's cheeks.

"It is because of that letter I am come," she said. "You made statements in it of which I desire information."

"If you want to know about the disposition of my

money, you can easily be gratified. I have made a will, devising my money to a charity."

"I do not care for your money," said Beryl, the color deepening in her face. "My husband is dead."

"Dead? Dead, did you say?"

"Yes, he has been dead some weeks," said Beryl.

"Dead! Impossible! Why are you not in mourning?" exclaimed Mr. Star suspiciously, scanning her garments. "You wear no widow's cap!"

"I can give you proof that he is dead," stated Beryl, producing a couple of newspapers from her pocket. "Here are a Geneva paper and a *Galignani's Messenger* with accounts of his death. You can read them."

Star, grim and unbelieving, began the perusal of the statements of Conyer's death.

"The man who lost his life at Monte Rosa was named Vane Conroy," he remarked, laying down the papers. "Your husband was named Conyers. How do you account for the discrepancy?"

"It was a blunder—a printer's error—or a simple mistake," said Beryl. "The name in the paper might have been his; I don't know. Conyers was not his real name. He did not marry me under his real name."

Mr. Star uttered an oath that made the girl shudder.

Fiercely he ejaculated: "You don't know his name? He may have left a legal widow—and you—and you—you foul disgrace—you sit there and look up at me calmly as if you were not a wretched outcast!"

"I am no outcast. I have done no wrong," said Beryl, her passionate eyes kindling. "I am innocent in the sight of Heaven. I married this man honestly, and would have been faithful to him all my days. I thought I loved him—I did love him. But he—he was calculating and scheming from the first. He fell in

love with me on the steamer, and wrote me letters, and made my acquaintance, and told me he adored me, and asked me to marry him; and all the while he believed me to be your heiress, and was counting upon getting a fortune through me. He would never have married me but that he knew me to be your niece. He was selfish and mercenary. Your cruel letter came to us as we sat in our garden on the lake of Geneva. He read it; he hurried away in a frightful rage, and I never saw him again. As our marriage was possibly illegal, if he had lived he might have deserted me a little later. Do you think a girl is a statue, without human feeling? If you had ever shown any affection for me, if I had had a home or friends, if there had been any one on earth to care for me, I should not have married as I did.

"I have come here to learn about myself—all that you know about me. I grew up at the *pensionnat* knowing that there was some mystery about my parentage; but, until your letter came to me a few weeks ago, I did not know what that mystery was. I am a woman now, and I have a right to know my history. Who was my mother?"

"My sister, Jenny Star—accursed be her memory!"

"And—and who was my father?"

"I don't know. If I did, I'd hunt him over the world," said Mr. Star, fiercely, the coldness and rigidity of his countenance giving place to a white, still anger that was terrible to behold. "I will tell you your mother's story. Listen."

CHAPTER XI.

THE HISTORY OF JENNY STAR.

"I was the only son of my father, and inherited all he had," said Farmer Star, to our heroine, Beryl. "I had a sister—Jenny—your mother, girl—eight years younger than I. She had not your red hair, but hair as black as jet, and brown eyes like yours. You have her eyes and her complexion and her slender figure. She carried herself like a princess, as you do. One would have thought she had sprung from a kingly race, she was so patrician in all her ways. Our mother died when Jenny was thirteen and I was twenty-one. The child fretted after the mother, and pined. She was as the apple of my eye, was Jenny. I was proud of her, and made plans for her, and it was I who persuaded my father to send Jenny to a fashionable boarding-school for young ladies, after mother's death. The school was at Brighton. Jenny came home at all the holidays, and she grew sweeter and prouder and more a lady with every half-term, and I made her more than ever my idol. She was seventeen when we recalled her, and she came home to stay."

He sighed heavily, and walked again to the window. Beryl was silent until he chose to resume, which he did some minutes later.

"Our home proved dull enough for our fine young lady," said Mr. Star, bitterly, staring out of the window, his back turned to Beryl. "She had learned to play, to

speak in French and sing in Italian, and her tastes were all different from ours. We—father and I—were only plain yeomen; she was a lady. Old Margot, the housekeeper then as now, spared her darling all household toil. Jenny went singing about the house, painted pictures for the walls, played her music, wandered through the fields and woods in search of ferns, and lived a life as useless as a lily's. As useless? I think it was not useless, for my father and I watched for her step, loved her very presence and were wickedly proud of her. Ah, but we were cruelly punished!"

Again he was silent for a little while. Beryl's gaze wandered to the walls. They were cold and gray in hue, without a picture to brighten them. Jenny Star's paintings had disappeared long ago.

"Jenny remained at home a year," said the farmer, in his cold voice, "and then confided to me that the dullness here was killing her. She wanted cultivated society, life, something congenial to do. We had educated our darling beyond our companionship. She secured a situation as governess in the family of a titled lady—the wife of Sir James Fortescue—through the interest of her former teachers, and she wanted to go at once. There was no need for her to go out as governess—father had money in plenty—but Jenny was willful and would go. I took her up to London, to Lady Fortescue's house in Portman Square myself, and left her there. That was nineteen years ago. During the first year of her stay there, she came home once to visit us. It was at the end of the year—in fact, in mid-summer. She had grown very beautiful, very elegant, and had lost nothing of her sweetness and gentleness. At the end of the next year, she did not come home, as during the previous year. She wrote that she could not be

spared. That letter came in June, saying that she could not come home, and that was the last letter we ever received from her."

Mr. Star stated the fact without emotion, still in that dry, hard voice he had all along employed.

"The summer went. September went, and no letter came from Jenny. Early in October, father could bear his anxieties no longer, and said I should go up to London and fetch our girl home. I went, for I, too, was uneasy, although I felt sure, if she had been ill, Lady Fortescue would have notified us. I went to Portman Square. I saw Lady Fortescue!" and Mr. Star's voice grew hoarser and stronger. "Jenny had not been in Lady Fortescue's house for a year and more!"

He quitted the window, and hurried across the floor, his stern features working convulsively.

"She had not been there since her visit to us during the preceding year! When she came home to visit us, she had resigned her situation, declaring that she could no longer teach, as she was needed at home. Oh, Jenny! Jenny! And for a whole year she had been—where? God alone knows. Lady Fortescue had not the remotest suspicion. Jenny had always behaved like a true lady, and had been a loved and honored member of the family, companion to Lady Fortescue as well as a governess to her ladyship's children. She had dined with the family; had spent her evenings in the drawing-room, where her musical gifts had been appreciated; and had received the usual attentions due a lady from the guests of the house. Jenny had had no lovers, so far as Lady Fortescue knew, and she was amazed to learn of our girl's year of absence from home, and could scarcely believe her in London. I went out of that house humbled, broken-hearted."

His voice faltered a little now, becoming strangely broken.

"I inquired for her at the post-office. Her letters had been taken out. I wrote a wild appeal to her, and posted it, and then watched at the office, but she did not come. A week went by. I must go home soon to my father with that terrible mystery. The evening before the day I had appointed for my return home, I was walking in Regent street, miserable, anxious and torn with anguish. A handsome carriage was going slowly through the street, with four gentlemen in it. I gave them a glance, scarcely seeing them, and walked on. I had not gone a dozen steps, when I came upon a woman who was staring after the carriage in a wild and eager sort of way, with some choked kind of cry on her lips. The woman's face was half-turned from me; she wore a long silk gown, that dragged in the dirt, and a gray shawl gathered about her shoulders, and a veil was caught back from her face by one thin hand. Yet I knew her—knew her at once. It was my sister Jenny!

"Yes, it was Jenny! I sprang to her, calling her name. She turned, recognized me with her wild eyes, and gave a great shriek, and fell on the pavement at my feet in a dead swoon. There was a crowd directly. I carried her into a shop and revived her, but she went into convulsions as she opened her eyes and beheld me. I found a card in her pocket with her name on it, 'Jenny Star,' and the address of her lodgings. I got a cab and took her to her home. It was a dingy place in a poor region. Her landlady was not devoid of humanity. We got Jenny in bed and sent for the doctor. While we waited his coming the landlady told me that Jenny had come to her three months before and secured lodgings, that she never had any visitors, that

her clothes were all fine and handsome, and that she had money. She knew Jenny as 'Miss Star,' a governess out of a situation, and thought her a lady born and bred, and had always treated her with respect. The convulsions continued—the doctor came—and on that night, that miserable night, you were born, and poor Jenny died!

"She never lived to take you in her arms, to tell me the story of that fatal year—she never pleaded for forgiveness, never tried to clear her name. She never even spoke my name after she beheld me on the street. I sent for my father the next day, and broke the news to him as gently as I could. The shock nearly killed him. We buried her in one of the great London cemeteries, and put a stone at her grave marked with her name, 'Jenny Star,' and her age, twenty years. We found a nurse for the child in the country to the north of London. Then we searched our girl's trunks, my old father and I. We found silk dresses, lace shawls, jewelry of value, a little purse of money, and evidences that Jenny supposed herself to be a lawful wife, but no clew to the man who had deserted her. If we had but found such a clew, I would have followed him the world over to avenge our disgrace. My father and I burned all the silks and laces and fine linen stuffs, but we kept the jewelry, thinking it might some day afford a clew to your father. The jewels you had at Vevay had been Jenny's in her girlhood. The others I have now in yonder desk. Having disposed of you and buried our dead, we took measures to hush up the awful secret of Jenny's fate, and went back to our desolate home. My father died within a month thereafter, of a broken heart, leaving all he possessed to me.

"I left you for two years with your nurse at the



CALLENDER SANK TO A SEAT ON THE STONE BALUSTRADE.—*See Page* 83.

country cottage where you both were boarded. I named you Beryl, because I knew a woman once of that name whom I hated. When you were two years of age I took you and your nurse to Vevay. A few years later she went back to Ireland, and was married. My sister's fate darkened my life. I never married. I have lived a lonely and secluded life, with but one hope—to meet some day that man and kill him.

"I gave you every chance to become a respectable woman, and you know how your blood has asserted itself, how you married that scoundrel whose death is the only good thing I've heard of him, and who had, doubtless, a wife living. You've no right to the name of Connors or Conroy, or whatever his devilish name is ; no right to the name of Star ; no right to existence even. You are not my niece ; I repudiate all your claims. You have no relatives, no friends, no name, no home—"

"No anything," finished Beryl, with an intense bitterness. "True. Perhaps after all this bitterness there may be something sweet in store for me yet."

"Not here—not at Starwood. As you've made your bed, so you must lie," said the farmer, in his grim, hard voice. "You can teach for a living, you can sew or dance, for aught I care, but you can't expect to be supported by me."

"I don't expect it," flashed Beryl. "I wouldn't take a penny from you, whatever my need. But I have one demand to make of you. Give me the jewels you found in my mother's trunks. They were given her by my unknown father, and belong of right to me."

The farmer made no objection to this demand, but went to his desk and unlocked an inner drawer, from which he withdrew a small square box of some delicate

inlaid wood. He brought this last to the table, unlocked it and pushed up the lid.

It was a jewel-box, with little trays covered with maroon velvet. It contained a set of amethyst jewels, a set of rubies and one of diamonds. The diamonds were small, but of the first water, and of rare brilliancy. Beryl looked at them all carefully, but the set of rubies, by far the most valuable and handsome, attracted the closest attention. She took out the tray that contained it, and held each article of the set in her hands.

There was a slender, flexible necklace of fine gold in small square links, and in each link was set a clear, small diamond like a drop of fire. The pendant of the necklace was a heart, cut out of a single ruby of the true pigeon's-blood color—a quaint East Indian jewel of remarkable value and splendor. Upon the ruby heart was engraved an odd device, which Beryl did not attempt to decipher.

"That looks as if it might have been an heir-loom in a wealthy family," she said. "That necklace may be a clue to my father."

With a sudden impulse, she clasped the necklace about her neck, hiding the ruby heart under her jacket.

"I will wear it until I find my father," she said, in a tone of determination, "for I shall find him some day—some instinct tells me so."

Mr. Star sneered.

"Do you think he would own you?" he asked. "Do you mean to make him support you?"

The girl's eyes flashed, but she did not answer.

"You'll find your mother's purse in the bottom of the box," said the farmer. "There's a hundred pounds

in it. I could never use it even to bury her. It belongs to you."

Beryl locked the box, thrust the key in her pocket, and arose.

"My business is ended here," she said. "Good-morning, sir."

"Have you no friends anywhere to whom you can go?"

"None;" and the girl's thin lips curved in a bitter smile. "I am all alone in the world. Good-morning."

And Beryl passed out of the home of her ancestors, re-entered the waiting cab, and drove away in the rain.

CHAPTER XII.

CONYERS SECURES A CLEAR FIELD.

Mr. Callender received the Earl of Hawkhurst and his young kinsmen with a hearty cordiality that assured them that they were welcome, and dispatched a servant to inform Miss Windsor of the presence of visitors.

It was several minutes before that heiress made her appearance, but she came sweeping in at last, handsome and self-possessed, with bright black eyes and carmine cheeks, her black hair in fashionable disarray, and a short square fringe of hair drooping over her forehead, in English nursery fashion. She had removed her fur sacque, and put on a jaunty sleeveless velvet jacket, which imparted grace to her costume.

"Octavia," said her uncle, advancing to meet her,

"your old friend Lord Hawkhurst has come to see you."

He offered his arm to lead her to the distinguished chief visitor, but the young lady broke from him in impetuosity, and ran to the earl, extending both hands.

"My dear Lord Hawkhurst!" she exclaimed, in an enthusiastic voice. "I am glad to meet you, my father's dearest friend; you will be his daughter's friend also, will you not, my Lord?"

The earl saw only his friend Windsor's handsome daughter, with Windsor's own black eyes and red cheeks, and he took both her hands in his own, and stooping, kissed her cheeks with a tenderness of which one would not have deemed him capable.

"I am your friend, Miss Windsor," he said, with a grave kindliness. "I wish you would look upon me as one of your best and truest friends. Permit me to present to you, Miss Windsor, my young kinsmen, Mr. Rollyn Conyers and Mr. Noble Desmond."

Dane Conyers made a low bow. Desmond also bowed.

Miss Windsor greeted both young gentlemen with quiet and easy self-possession. She begged her visitors to resume their seats, and sat down close beside the earl, devoting herself to him with flattering assiduity.

The visit was prolonged to an hour and more, and when the earl and his young kinsmen arose to take their leave, Miss Windsor pressed them to visit her often.

"Cragthorpe is so dull after life at Hombourg and Baden-Baden," she sighed. "I should like to fill this great house with visitors. I am impatient to go to town. I expect to take part in society this winter, and anticipate a brilliant season."

"The season is sure to be brilliant if you take part in it, Miss Windsor," said Conyers.

The visitors took their leave.

As they rode out at the lodge gates into the public road, Lord Hawkhurst, who was in excellent humor, scanned his young companions with a keen glance, and demanded :

"Well, Conyers, what did you think of our young hostess ?"

"She is a very handsome young lady," answered Conyers, with enthusiasm. "I expected to find an ugly young woman, with personal defects enough to counterbalance her fortune—that's generally the way, you know, my Lord—and I was surprised to behold that fine creature, so self-possessed, so beautiful."

Perhaps this enthusiasm of Conyers was worldly. He certainly admired Cragthorpe, but he did not especially admire its supposed owner. His love for Beryl yet survived, and if it had been dead, Miss Windsor's style of beauty was not at all to his taste, and could never have touched his heart. But he reasoned within himself that he had given his heart full scope once and what had resulted ? The maddest marriage he could have made, viewed from his present standpoint. Now, that he had so cleverly freed himself from Beryl's claims, he would take care to assure his fortune.

"If the earl doesn't make me his heir, I can become master of Cragthorpe," he thought. "The girl was taken with me, I could see that. I'll follow up my advantage and marry her before she goes up to town and gets ambitious for a higher alliance. I know I can win her, and I will."

He set his lips together in an expression of determination.

"Well?" said the earl, who was watching him. "Do you think you can love Miss Windsor?"

"I love her already."

"You would like to marry her?"

"Yes, my Lord. I am from this moment her suitor."

"Humph!" said the earl. "And you, Desmond? Did you fall in love with the handsome heiress?"

Desmond's lazy face had something in it of scorn for the young lady, as he replied:

"No, my Lord."

"What! Do you not admire her?"

"No, sir," answered the young gentleman, gravely. "I shall not enter myself as a suitor to Miss Windsor's hand."

Lord Hawkhurst's red face flashed yet more redly.

"You speak cavalierly," he remarked. "What objection have you to the young lady?"

"They are many, sir. I think her insincere, scheming—but why should I venture my opinion upon her faults and shortcomings? She can be nothing to me. It is enough that she could never touch my heart."

"Oh, bother your heart!" exclaimed the earl, testily. "Confound such priggishness. What do you want? An angel from Heaven?

"No, sir," answered Desmond, quietly. "But I have my ideal, and Miss Windsor does not fulfill it. I regard marriage as something more than a union of hands and lands—as something that effects a man's entire destiny on this earth."

"What nonsense!" ejaculated the earl. "Are you one of those accursed radicals, Desmond? One of those debasing levelers of rank and caste? It's well I've learned your bent of mind. Why, you would make a

street-beggar mistress of Hawks' Cliff, if you owned it, I dare say."

"If I found a girl I really loved, my Lord, I would make her my wife and the mistress of all my possessions, no matter whether she were a beggar or no."

The earl's face expressed his horror of such a sentiment.

"This marrying below one's own rank is the maddest folly," he said bitterly. "Even the wildest passion cannot excuse it. I want no street-beggar to reign at Hawks' Cliff, and I advise you, Desmond, to get rid of your leveling ideas. They will be your ruin."

"I am not the radical you think me, sir," said Desmond, smiling. "And I am not a romantic young man bent upon a low marriage. I only meant to say that I believe love to be one of the divinest instincts of our nature; that a wife should be in truth the nobler and better half of man; and that if I ever love, I shall not stifle the sentiment because its object may be poor or low-born. It is what she is in herself, not what relations or outward circumstances are, that concerns me."

"The rankest nonsense I ever heard," said the earl. "There are no Lord Burleighs nowadays. You are a foolish young enthusiast, Desmond; just the man to ruin yourself in a fit of mad folly, and rue it all your life after. Rashness and folly and headstrong impetuosity run in the Desmond blood, I think. And so because Miss Windsor doesn't touch your heart, as you express it, you coolly relinquish all hope of owning Cragthorpe some day. Very well, young gentleman. I suppose you know how I have built upon the scheme of uniting the two estates?"

"I do know, sir. But I dislike doing violence to my own principles, even to secure your favor," said Des-

mond, sharply. "This whole plan has revolted me from the first. I did not like to come here as a competitor for your favor, as the rival of Conyers, to air my best qualities in the hope of becoming your heir."

"Then you virtually relinquish all desire and prospect of becoming my heir?"

"I do, sir," said Desmond. "I honor you as a man and a gentleman, I respect and esteem you, my Lord, I admire your noble qualities, but I refuse to lower my manhood to gain any prize whatever!"

"You shall be counted out, then, Mr. Desmond. There is henceforth no possibility of your becoming my heir. I will not detain you longer at Hawks' Cliff, sir, since your remarkable independence and sense of what is due to your 'principles' may make your stay unpleasant. No man shall sacrifice his 'principles' for the sake of getting my money."

The remainder of the ride home was accomplished in silence. As they rode up the long, steep, winding avenue that led from the public road to Hawks' Cliff Castle, the earl broke the silence, exclaiming:

"Conyers, a last word with you. Win Miss Windsor to be your wife, secure Cragthorpe, and I will make a will giving you Hawks' Cliff and all I own in the world."

Conyer's eyes sparkled.

"You will?" he exclaimed. "You will make me your heir, my Lord?"

"On condition that you secure Cragthorpe to add to my estates," said the earl. "I have great confidence in the instincts of a pure, high-bred girl. Get Octavia Windsor to indorse you by marrying you, and I will publicly acknowledge you as my heir."

"I will bring Miss Windsor to Hawks' Cliff before Christmas as my bride!"

"I suppose you will want to return to London and law, Desmond," said Lord Hawkhurst, with a freezing courtesy, addressing his younger kinsman. "Yet I should like you to remain at Hawks' Cliff, to witness the home-coming of the future mistress."

"Thanks, my Lord," said Desmond, "but I return to London immediately. I shall leave the castle within an hour."

The earl bowed. The three alighted, and entered the dwelling, Desmond going to his own room to pack his portmanteau, and Conyers, in fine spirits, seeking his own chambers. As he opened his door, with the words of a song on his lips, Huplick, just arrived from Switzerland, arose, and advanced to meet him.

CHAPTER XIII.

"NOW OR NEVER."

Conyers was not at all surprised at finding his sleek valet awaiting him. He had expected his arrival for some days with impatience. He recognized his presence by a brief nod, and carefully secured the door, and advanced to the middle of the spacious chamber before he asked:

"Well, what news?"

Huplick had, in his letters to his master, told the story of Beryl's movements from the time of her desertion to her setting out to appeal to the Bassetts. He now replied to Conyers's question with:

"She found your diary, sir, and read them there

entries, and I believe she hated and despised you then as much as she had loved you before. She gave me your clothes, your dressing-bag, and even your money. She wouldn't keep a penny of it for herself."

Conyers face had grown pale ; now it flushed darkly.

"I always knew she was proud," he scoffed. "I wanted her not to mourn after me, and all that, you know, but how is she to get along without money ? I suppose her future is her own look-out. She'll go back to her old *pensionnat* and become an under-governess, for poverty and loneliness will bring down her pride, or she'll write to her uncle for a small income to support her quietly abroad."

"Yes, sir," said Huplick, "but it's nearly three weeks since I left Switzerland. I didn't think it best to come directly here, lest I should possibly bring suspicion upon you at some future time. It isn't likely that the young lady will ever suspect a hoax, or that her uncle may scent the truth, but it's a good rule to be always on guard. So I stopped a week in Paris, another week in London and nearly a week with some relations of mine in Lincolnshire. I made friends with Madame Pinnet, and gave her a present at parting, and she promised to write to me at London. I was in London the day before yesterday, and found there two letters from her. Here they are, sir. In one of them, madame says that the young lady is getting well rapidly. In the later letter she says that the young lady has left the Villa Belvoir for good and all. The young lady went to Geneva. Madame Pinnet followed her next day to see whither she had gone, and discovered that she was gone to Zermatt !"

"The deuce ! She must have doubted your story

then, else she would never have thought of visiting the scene of the catastrophe."

"It was probably a morbid desire to obtain a realizing sense of your death in the place where she supposed it had occurred. I can't explain it," said Huplick, "but I am sure that she could have gone to see the spot where her husband was said to have perished without at all doubting his death. It's fortunate we made all safe, Mr. Conyers, and that her belief in your sad fate will only be confirmed by a visit to Monte Rosa."

"Yes, yes, but I don't like her going," declared Conyers. "I'd like to know her next move. I wish you had remained to watch her a little longer; not that I fear her, a girl barely seventeen years old, and as shy and innocent of the world as any convent novice. But still—"

His voice died out in a thoughtful silence.

"She's all right," said Huplick. "She thinks your name was not Conyers, and has gone back to her old girlhood name. She'll take precious good care not to come to England, and her uncle wouldn't have her here, that's clear. You are well rid of her, Mr. Conyers. The summer's folly is all ended. And by-and-by, when the name of Conyers is lost sight of under the title of Earl of Hawkhurst, you'll be completely hidden, particularly as you are known here as Rollyn Conyers, and that's the name that will go into the Peerage Book. Is the other young gentleman here yet, sir?"

"Desmond? Yes, but he leaves to-day. I've bowled him out of the game completely. The earl has hinted to him that his room is better than his company. More than that," and Conyers's eyes began to gleam, "the earl told me before Desmond, that if I would marry the heiress of Cragthorpe, a daughter of Lord Hawkhurst's

once most intimate friend, that he would make a will constituting me his heir."

"Can you marry her, sir?" the valet asked.

"I can and will," was the confident response. "We have just been to call upon her. I saw that she regarded me with favor, and I shall follow up the general good impression I made by the most assiduous attentions. In marrying her I secure Cragthorpe, and the earl's promise is conditional upon my possessing Cragthorpe. I should like a grand marriage, but I think that will be out of the question. I think she is romantic—school-girls mostly are—and I mean to persuade her to a hurried and private marriage, after which I will bring my bride to Hawks' Cliff and present her to the earl. A remarkably neat programme, you see."

"Remarkable!" assented the confidential servant. "Is this heiress beautiful?"

"No, not beautiful," said Conyers, reluctantly, and with a sigh. "Not like *her*, of course; not beautiful at all, in fact. She's got a pair of black eyes of twenty-gimlet capacity; steady, bold, unpleasant eyes, without a particle of softness in them. She has cheeks like damask roses; but I never liked milk-maid complexions. Her hair is black and straight, and her lips are too thick to look well on a white person's face. Yet she is handsome; a big, bouncing, fine young woman, with a heavy tread, a grenadier walk, a lofty air of self-assertion. She weighs twelve stone, I'll dare swear, and at forty she'll be fat enough to win admiration in the Congo Free State, where they fat women as geese are fatted at Strasbourg. Yes, she'll be a great, puffy, overfed, overblown, fat woman; and I hate fat women!" grumbled Conyers.

Conyers prolonged the conversation until the luncheon-bell rang, and it became necessary to descend to the breakfast-room.

At luncheon the earl informed Conyers that he should invite Miss Windsor and her uncle to dine with him informally that day week.

The next morning, providing himself with the choicest bouquet the conservatories of Hawks' Cliff could furnish, Conyers rode down the coast alone to Cragthorpe. He found Miss Windsor at home, and apparently pleased to see him. He was at his best, gay, genial and fascinating; and the girl felt the force of the charms that had won poor Beryl. His flatteries were almost fulsome, for he saw that Miss Windsor fed upon compliments as some women devour sugar-plums, and when he rose to go, the young lady invited him cordially to come often—Cragthorpe was so dull.

He did go often. The next day found him at Cragthorpe, the next and the next. He went every day for a week. Mr. Callender invited him to remain to luncheon upon one occasion, and he did remain.

The day on which Miss Windsor and Mr. Callender were invited to dine at Hawks' Cliff dawned at last. Upon the morning of that day, Miss Windsor sat in the drawing-room of Cragthorpe, when her uncle joined her, a look of annoyance on his face.

"Another letter from Canada, Octavia," he said, carefully closing the door, and speaking cautiously. "Another letter from your Uncle Windsor."

"What does he say, Uncle Griffin?"

"He reiterates his promise to be home in January, and urges me to keep his continued existence a secret until his appearance at Cragthorpe. He wants to see the young lady whom he intends to marry, and

announce his return to her in person. The letter reminds me of the frailty of our tenure here, Octavia. One week of our brief grace is gone. It's a week yesterday since we learned that your uncle lives and will assert his claim to Cragthorpe; one week since you first saw young Conyers. What progress have you made toward winning him?"

"I have virtually won him," said Miss Windsor.

"Has he proposed yet?"

"Certainly not. He has only known me a week—"

"In a week the destinies of all the nations of Europe may be changed. He has seen you every day for a week. He acts like a lover. Bring him to the point this very day, Octavia. I tell you, you have no time to lose. Your uncle may return at any time. Or the fact that he is not dead may get wind in some way, and your prospects will be ruined. Secure Conyers at once. Don't try to play your fish with a long line. Land him as quickly as possible if you want to be safe. I feel nervous and ill at ease, Octavia."

Miss Windsor shared the feeling.

"I suppose I can bring him to the point to-day, Uncle Griffin,"she said; "but I may not be able to manage it. People don't usually propose in such mad haste, and he might suspect that something was wrong about my ownership of Cragthorpe."

"You think that because you know that you are not its owner; but he does not suspect it. Take my advice, Octavia, and marry him directly. There is too much dependent on this marriage for you to play the coquette, and hang back for the usual lengthy courtship and engagement. If you can bring him to your feet, the sooner you can do it the better. Before your uncle can possibly return, you should be installed at Hawks'

Cliff as Mrs. Rollyn Conyers, the future Countess of Hawkhurst."

"I will be!" said Miss Windsor, determinedly. "You are right, uncle Griffin. I will bring Conyers to the point to-day, and marry him within a week."

Accordingly, Miss Windsor drove to Hawkhurst at a late hour of the day, in company with Mr. Callender, determined to win a proposal of marriage from Conyers that very night

Oddly enough, Conyers, actuated by motives of equal purity, was determined to make a proposal of marriage to the heiress that very night, and so decide his own fortunes.

The old castle of Hawks' Cliff was all ablaze with lights when the Cragthorpe carriage drove into the porch, and Miss Windsor and her uncle alighted. The earl, in full dinner dress, met them at the foot of the marble steps, and gave his arm to Miss Windsor, escorting her into the house. The lady-housekeeper was in waiting to conduct the young lady to a dressing-room, and Miss Windsor disappeared with her.

Dinner was announced at seven oclock, and the earl gave his arm to Miss Windsor, and led the way to the dining-room, Mr. Callender and Conyers bringing up the rear.

The dining-room was a large, long, handsome room, with frescoed walls and ceiling, and with frequent niches along the sides of the room, in which full-length marble statues were ensconced. There were great circular windows, looking into a flower-garden, and one end of the room was fitted with glazed sliding-doors that opened into a magnificent fernery.

The oval table glittered with polished crystal, silver and gold plate, and painted porcelain of Sévres, all dis-

played upon napery of exquisite beauty. A tall *èpergne* of frosted silver, filled with flowers, occupied the centre of the table, rising from a tiny lake formed by a mirror, around whose edge water-lilies were gracefully fringed. The dinner was as sumptuous as its appurtenances, comprising all the luxuries November can afford from the woods, the fields, the streams, and the forcing and hot-houses.

The party, though small, was not dull. Lord Hawkhurst was full of wit and wisdom; Mr. Callender had primed himself with anecdotes and repartee for the occasion, and Miss Windsor and Conyers were both animated, even to vivacity.

The dinner over, the earl and Mr. Callender lingered over the nuts and wine, but Conyers arose to open the door for Miss Windsor, and passed out with her. They returned to the drawing-room together.

"The night is clear; the moon is shining," said Conyers. "Let us go out upon the cliff and watch the sea in the moonlight. Shall we not?"

Miss Windsor assented and brought a short cloak of white cashmere covered with white silk embroidery and edged with swan's-down. Conyers wrapped it around her, gave her his arm, and they left the castle together, straying out upon the cliff.

"I'll propose to her this very hour—here—now!" thought Conyers, his heart beating loudly. "I must secure Cragthorpe. I can't afford to dally along in this uncertainty. It's now or never!"

"I'll bring him to the point before I go into the castle again," thought Miss Windsor, hanging on his arm. "I must secure a home at Hawks' Cliff before I lose Cragthorpe. It's now or never!"



THE NIGHT IS CLEAR, THE MOON IS SHINING.—*See Page* 112.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEVELOPING A TWO-FOLD PURPOSE.

As Beryl passed out at the gates of Starwood, entering the public road, she pressed her face against the wet panes of the window of the fly, and looked back upon the inhospitable dwelling which had once been her mother's early home. The old Tudoresque house, which was more a mansion than a farm-house, looked almost stately to the homeless girl, as it loomed up through the mist of rain. What a safe refuge it might have been to her! What a peaceful life she might have lived beneath those clustering chimneys and that picturesque roof!

The vehicle began to move more swiftly, and the shrubbery intervened, shutting out her view of the house. She was about to withdraw her face from the window, when she beheld a woman's figure start out of the shrubbery at one side of the road, with both arms thrown up in a gesture commanding the flyman to halt.

He came to a halt at once.

The woman approached the vehicle. She was bent and withered, and wore a dark tweed cloak over her head and shoulders. She was old Margot, the housekeeper at Starwood, and Beryl recognized her at once, and hastened to lower the window.

"Did you wish to speak to me?" asked the girl.

"Yes, miss," said the old woman, in a low tone, too low to reach the ears of the muffled flyman. "I knew

the master would send you away, and I came here to wait for you. You have Miss Jenny's eyes. Poor lamb! I nursed her in her babyhood; I carried her in my bosom; I watched over her as if I had been her mother —my pretty nursling! And you—I knew it the minute I set eyes on you—you are Miss Jenny's daughter. You have her bonny brown eyes. I listened at the door when the master told you that sad story. Have you friends in England?"

"I have no friends anywhere."

"No friends? And you so young and beautiful! I have a sister in London who lets lodgings. I've written her name down on a card for you, and here it is. Go to her, miss, and tell her I sent you. She will help you to get something to do. I'll write to her by the post. It's a humble home for the likes of you, miss," said old Margot, marking the patrician grace and beauty of the girl, "but it will be a safe one."

"I will go there!" said Beryl, impulsively, touched by the old woman's kindly interest in her, as she took the proffered card of address. "I thank you very much. I am a stranger in England, and I never had a home."

"Poor child!" said old Margot. "Better days will come, miss, mark my words. I will come to see you in London in a day or two. My darling used to kiss me often," she added, wistfully. "You look so strangely like her—may I kiss your hand?"

The tears rushed to Beryl's eyes. She leaned forward and kissed the drawn and wrinkled face of the old woman without a word.

Old Margot gave back the kiss with interest, and turned away in silence, and plunged again into the shrubbery from which she had emerged.

It was late in the afternoon when Beryl arrived at

London, took a cab to the address given her by old Margot, and was finally brought to a dingy brick dwelling in Arundel street, Strand. The shades were all drawn down, and the house would have looked deserted but for the light that streamed out through the oblong window above the door. The cabman ran up the wet steps and sounded the knocker. He then returned, opened the cab-door, and Beryl paid him and dismissed him. She mounted the steps, as a slatternly maid-servant opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Toploft at home?" inquired the young lady, advancing into the narrow passage that served as entrance hall.

"Yes, miss," was the prompt response. "Step into the drawing-room, miss, while I speak to the missus."

Beryl passed into the drawing-room, and the servant hurried away in quest of her mistress.

The "drawing-room" was only a very dull and dingy little parlor, but after the wet gloom outside, it looked both cheerful and pleasant to Beryl.

The lodging-house keeper, old Margot's sister, presently made her appearance, in a faded black alpaca gown, and wearing a cap with cherry ribbons.

She was a big, fussy, jolly, slipshod person, with an elephantine tread and asthmatic breathing.

The result of the negotiations of the next few minutes was that Beryl hired the front room on the second floor, with attendance, at a moderate weekly sum, and took possession, paying a week's rent in advance.

Mrs. Toploft came up to see her after supper, and remained an hour. After she had departed, Beryl took possession of an easy-chair by the fire, and gave herself up to deep and earnest thought.

"I am in England—in London—where my mother

lived out that year of mystery, and died so terribly—in London, where I was born. I wonder if my father is in London. I wonder if he lives. I dedicate my existence, here and now, to the task of clearing my mother's name, of finding my father, and of discovering the true name and history of my dead husband, Dane Conyers. This double task will give me work, will fill up my lonely life, and to this double task I solemnly devote myself, and may God help me!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE.

Beryl told but little of her own story to Margot, who came to London the next day to see her. Her wounds were yet unhealed, and she could not bare them to curious eyes. She stated that she had been married in September, and that in October her husband had met his death by an accident in the Swiss Alps; but she did not mention the name of her husband, and there was a delicate reserve in her manner which, while it was not haughty, or even marked, yet deterred old Margot from making any close inquiries. The housekeeper longed to ask her why she did not bear her husband's name, yet she dared not.

"I must go to work, Margot," Beryl stated. "You know the world better than I do. Advise me what to do. Teaching as a resident governess in a family or school is out of the question. But I might possibly

procure day-pupils. Would it not be best to advertise?"

"My sister used to be housekeeper in a wealthy tradesman's family in Brunswick Square. They were a good sort of people," said old Margot, "but the lady was a regular screw, used to beat down prices like a huckster woman, and was always buying an inferior article because it was cheaper, while she kept up a brave outside show. This Mrs. Ryan came to see my sister a week ago, and mentioned that she had just discharged her children's daily governess, and that she was seeking another. Possibly, if you gave your services very cheaply, you might get that situation, Miss Beryl, but it may be already taken. And if it were not, she might object to you because of the mystery about you. My sister will go to see her this very day, and try to procure the situation for you, if you desire her to do so."

"I shall be very grateful," said Beryl. "I should prefer such a situation at any salary, however low, because I am competent to teach, and I know nothing of any of the trades. But if I cannot become a teacher, I will be a shopwoman, or a milliner, or a flower-maker —anything that I can readily learn and by which I can support myself."

Old Margot interested her sister in the young lodger, without unfolding much of Beryl's story, and Mrs. Toploft promised to assist the young girl to the best of her ability in her—Beryl's—efforts to earn her living.

The next morning Mrs. Toploft visited her former mistress, and found that the vacant situation of daily governess was not yet filled. She recommended Beryl so highly that Mrs. Ryan consented to see the girl, and that very afternoon Beryl went to Brunswick square.

She had dressed herself in a walking-suit of black

silk, but her slender figure, her upright carriage, her lovely face, her high-bred manner, all combined to give her a distinguished appearance which no simplicity of costume could mar.

She alighted at the house of Mrs. Ryan, and bade the cabman wait for her. A servant in livery gave her admittance into the dwelling, and ushered her into a reception-room, taking her card to his mistress.

There was no appearance of meanness in the proportions of the rooms, or in the manner in which they were furnished. There was an air of comfort, and even luxury, in the show rooms of this house, notwithstanding that the fire was meagre and gave forth an insufficient amount of heat for the chilly November weather.

Beryl had ample time to become fully acquainted with her surroundings before Mrs. Ryan made her appearance. She was growing impatient at last, when the rustle of silken drapery was heard in the hall, heralding the entrance of the city merchant's wife. She rose up as the lady came in, greeting her with a low bow.

"Miss Star, I believe?" said Mrs. Ryan, referring to the card which she held in her hand. "You are the young person Toploft came to see me about this morning? Ah, yes. Be seated, Miss Star."

Beryl resumed her seat.

Mrs. Ryan sank indolently into an easy chair.

"Toploft tells me," said Mrs. Ryan in an affected, stilted voice, meant to impress Beryl with a sense of the lady's importance, "that you are desirous of obtaining a situation as a daily governess. I have but lately discharged the young person who acted in that capacity in my house, and have not yet supplied myself with a person to succeed her. I don't know what the world is coming to, I'm sure. Young women must ape their

superiors in dress nowadays, and consequently exact larger salaries than they can possibly earn. I would send my children to boarding-school, only the charges for six would be positively frightful, and, besides, their father dotes upon them and cannot bear to send them away from home. I don't like a governess in the house, as I have a children's maid, and a governess's board amounts to no small sum at the end of a year. It is worth a guinea a week, at the very least, my housekeeper says, although the governess would dine here with the children in the school-room. Toploft says you have never taught, and that you were educated in Switzerland. I suppose you speak French with the true Parisian accent?"

"Yes, madam. We had a Parisian lady for our instructress in French."

"I always insist upon the Parisian accent," said Mrs. Ryan. "Of course, you speak German and Italian? They are indispensable."

"I speak both," said Beryl. "No expense was spared upon my education, madam, and I was fond of study. I am competent to teach English, also, and drawing and music and painting."

"Oh, English doesn't matter," said Mrs. Ryan, somewhat contemptuously. "Any one can teach English. I don't pay my money for that, I assure you. I have two boys at school; you will have nothing to do with them. My six girls will be under your charge, if I conclude to engage you. The youngest girl is six years of age; the oldest, fifteen. My boys are older. You are very young; you don't look as old as my Thusa, my oldest girl. Toploft said you had no friends in England, and that you are inexperienced in teaching, so that you can refer to no one in regard to your ability to

teach. She says that you come of a very good Surrey family, and I can take her word for that. Toploft is a very worthy, reliable creature, and I don't know but that I am willing to engage you upon her recommendation. What salary should you expect?"

"I do not know what my services would be worth, Mrs. Ryan. I would prefer that you should pay me what you think right," said Beryl.

"Very well. You would have to come at eight o'clock in the morning, and remain until twelve," said Mrs. Ryan, in a calculating voice, "and return at one and stay until six; that is nine hours a day. And Saturday afternoon would be a half-holiday. My children would require instruction in all the branches you have named. For faithful teaching, giving the time and instruction I have named, reserving Saturday afternoon and Sundays to yourself, I am willing to pay a guinea a week."

Beryl's heart sank. Her lodging in Arundel street, with attendance, cost her sixteen shillings a week. Could she pay omnibus fares to Brunswick Square, or the point nearest to it to which an omnibus would bring her, buy boots, clothing, books, to say nothing of food, out of five shillings a week? The feat would be impossible.

She was inclined to resent the proposal and refuse it in the same breath, but a wise impulse restrained her. She knew that Mrs. Ryan was trading upon the facts of her youth, her inexperience and her lack of desirable recommendations. Why should she not accept these miserly terms and acquire experience? She had money remaining from the sale of her mother's jewels at Geneva, and could manage by a close economy, to maintain existence for some months, with

the aid of the guinea per week which Mrs. Ryan would be willing to pay her; and after a year's faithful service she could get a better place, and be permitted to refer to Mrs. Ryan as her former patron. If she refused this paltry remuneration she might seek for a place for a long time in vain. Mrs. Toploft had said that there were more people in London seeking places than there were places wanting people.

Mrs. Ryan watched all the changes in the girl's face with hidden eagerness, but she was certain what would be Beryl's decision, even before the girl said:

"I will accept the terms you offer, madam, although they are miserably inadequate to my support, and although I shall not have time to form other engagements and thus add to my income. I will take the situation and do my best to please you and to improve my pupils. Do you wish to test my proficiency in French or German or Italian?"

Mrs. Ryan looked at the girl sharply, suspecting her of satire, but Beryl was in simple earnest, and the lady declined to test her knowledge of the languages mentioned.

"I can trust Toploft," she said. "Toploft eulogized you and your acquirements and told me a great deal about you. There is some mystery connected with you but Toploft assured me that you were of good birth and respectable, and that you were fresh from school, and I shall not seek to pry into your private affairs. You may come next Monday morning at eight o'clock to begin your new duties, and I shall pay you one guinea every Saturday noon. Is this satisfactory?"

Beryl gave assent. Mrs. Ryan proceeded to make a few further inquiries, but Mrs. Toploft had recommended Beryl so highly that the lady had no anxieties

in regard to the young girl's capabilities or respectability, and the result of the negotiation was that Beryl left the house a little later under engagement to act as daily governess to the young Ryans at a price that would hardly suffice to keep soul and body together.

In conversation with Mrs. Toploft later in the day, Beryl was advised to learn embroidery, in order that she might sell fancy-work at some of the bazaars, and that would give her work for the long evenings.

The suggestion struck Beryl favorably. She resolved to take lessons in silk-embroidery. To find an instructress was not difficult, and the next day she was taking lessons of a faded and reduced old gentle-woman who had lodgings at the West End, and who was recommended to her by Mrs. Toploft.

Upon the following Monday, Beryl began her duties as a daily governess in the Ryan household in Brunswick Square. She found the Ryan children spoilt, froward, impertinent and rebellious, and her hot temper rose many times upon that unpleasant first day, and during the days that followed.

She proved a diligent instructress, patient, earnest, anxious that her pupils should improve ; and Mrs. Ryan, who was present during the first few days nearly all the time, congratulated herself anew on obtaining such a model governess at such a merely nominal salary.

While Beryl thus instructed others, she continued to take lessons in embroidery in the evening, and made rapid progress in the art. As her expenses considerably exceeded her income, she put herself upon Spartan fare. In the morning she sometimes rode to the neighborhood of Brunswick Square in an omnibus, but at night she invariably walked home, whatever the state of the weather.

It was a hard and bitter life, but Beryl lived it cheerfully and without repining. And while she thus struggled and toiled, and thought of her young husband as dead, he, exulting in the deceit he had practiced upon her, and believing her still in Switzerland, was at Hawks' Cliff Castle, making love to another woman, his path seeming strewn with roses.

CHAPTER XVI.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND!

Although he had made up his mind to urge his suit with Miss Windsor without further delay, Dane Conyers would not be too precipitate. He had known the young lady but a week, and he feared lest she should rebuke his presumption, or refuse him altogether. The heiress of Cragthorpe might expect to win a titled husband; he knew her nature to be full of ambition; would she be likely to look kindly upon him whose title and possible fortune lay in the dim future?

"It's a lovely moonlight," he said, resolving to work around to his object cautiously. "How glorious the sea looks in the pale flood!"

"Yes," said Miss Windsor, absently; "it does look pretty."

"I adore moonlight," continued Dane Conyers, racking his brain vainly for some brilliant idea. "Would you like to go out in a boat? I see a little sail-boat below the cliff."

"I don't care to sail to-night; it is too chilly."

"Ah, yes; forgive me. I should have thought of that. How lovely Hawks' Cliff is by moonlight! It is a grand old place, Miss Windsor. The park is two hundred years old, I have heard. I hope the earl may live many years to enjoy it. I regret to hear that he has heart-disease, and that he holds his life by such uncertain tenure."

Conyers was lying for a purpose. The earl had not heart-disease, and he knew it. But Miss Windsor believed him, and his eligibility was increased a hundred fold in her estimation thereby.

"Poor Lord Hawkhurst!" she sighed. "I love him dearly. It is sad to think that a blight lurks in the heart of a flower so fair."

Conyers could have laughed had he not been so anxious. The comparison of the fierce-tempered, red-haired, fiery-souled earl to a flower was keenly ridiculous. But he could not afford to laugh at the heiress of Cragthorpe.

"I love him, too," he said, hypocritically; "and I am sure that he regards me as a dear son. You know that the title will come to me in any case. Lord Hawkhurst sent Desmond away to his plodding again, and has made his will constituting me his heir. I shall have all the great Hawkhurst property when Lord Hawkhurst dies."

Miss Windsor felt sure that she must secure Conyers at all hazards and immediately. Her voice trembled, as she said:

"I am glad that the earl decided to allow his property to support the title. It is the proper way, you know. I never liked Desmond, and I am delighted to have you

for a neighbor. I hope you will marry some one whom I shall like," and she strove to speak archly.

"I hope I shall. I am in love now, Miss Windsor, and the lady of my choice would grace a dukedom."

"Indeed!" said the young lady, acidly. "Then you are engaged to be married?"

"No, I am not engaged. I have known the lady but a short time," ventured Conyers. "I dare not tell her yet what impression her charms have made upon me. I am timid in her presence. Propriety exacts a longer time between the first meeting and the proposal of marriage, and yet I love her so wildly, that I can scarcely obey the dictates of prudence, and wait longer before declaring myself."

Miss Windsor's heart gave an exultant leap.

"There's an old Scotch saying that 'Happy's the wooing that is not long a-doing,'" she observed, encouragingly. "There are natures that are not ruled by all the dull old forms—that dare be warm and quick. Perhaps the lady you love has such a nature. I have. If you have not known her long, it may be that your love for her has kindled an answering spark in her soul. I should advise you not to wait, but to tell her the truth. Depend upon it, a woman always likes to be told that she is loved."

She smiled archly, and clung to his arm yet more closely.

"Your words almost tempt me to dare," said Conyers, trembling. "Miss Windsor—Octavia—can you have guessed the truth? Oh, no, it is impossible!"

"Why impossible?" asked Miss Windsor, in a whisper. "Is it—is it—"

She appeared to pause in maidenly embarrassment.

Conyers needed little more encouragement. He came to the point at once.

"It is you!" he exclaimed. "Octavia, dearest, it is you whom I love. Since the hour I first beheld you, I have been determined to call you mine. I am the earl's heir; I shall be the next Lord Hawkhurst. The earl loves you for your father's sake, and desires our marriage. He wants to see you mistress of Hawks' Cliff. Octavia, I lay my heart at your feet. Will you marry me?"

Miss Windsor was obliged to repress her exultation before she could speak.

"Yes," she whispered at last. "Oh, Rollyn! I have loved you all the while."

He put his arm around her and kissed her. Her head drooped to his shoulder. And then, as if in mockery of this scene, came back to him the memory of Beryl, and the moment when she had consented to marry him. He loved Beryl even now, and a fierce pang rent his heart, as he wished in his soul that Beryl could have been well-born and an heiress. He had no regret even now for ridding himself of his young wife, who believed him dead; he was not a man to feel regrets; but he felt a loathing for Octavia Windsor and a bitter revolt against his fate, and the curses that filled his soul were not the less bitter that he dare not utter them.

"Dearest!" he whispered, with lying lips, "how happy I am! This, indeed, is the happiest moment of my life."

"And of mine, too," said Miss Windsor, truthfully enough, although she had no love for her suitor.

"How pleased Lord Hawkhurst will be! We must declare our engagement at once."

"I don't mind letting the earl and uncle Griffin

know," said Miss Windsor, determined, since she had succeeded so far, to bring about an immediate marriage, "but I don't want our engagement generally known. You must not tell any one else, Rollyn."

"But why not, Octavia?"

"Because—because I am going to spend the season in town, and I mean to be a belle, and have a crowd of admirers, that is why," said Miss Windsor with an artificial little laugh.

Conyers experienced a thrill of alarm.

"You shall have your season in town and be a belle," he said; "but why not also appear as a bride? Octavia, I hate long engagements. My nature is one of impatience. Marry me now, dearest, within a month. I must secure you before a throng of suitors surrounds you. I am impatient to marry you. I am afraid something may happen to part us. If you love me, consent to an immediate marriage."

"But what would Lord Hawkhurst think of such haste."

"He would not know of our marriage until I should bring you to Hawks' Cliff as my wife. And then he would laugh at our lovers' ardor, and give us his blessing. I know he would be pleased."

Conyers urged his cause with all the eloquence he could command. Miss Windsor permitted him to exhaust his stock of persuasions and entreaties; but being as anxious to secure Hawks' Cliff as he was to secure Cragthorpe, she finally yielded a gracious assent.

Conyers was nearly overcome with rapture.

"I shall go to Penzance to-morrow and procure a special license," he said. "And the next morning I shall call upon you at Cragthorpe, and we will ride

together to Penzance, and be married. Is this our programme, dearest?"

"Yes. I wish I dare tell uncle Griffin; but he thinks that I ought to marry a duke at the very least," said the young lady, artfully. "No, it's out of the question—telling uncle, I mean," and she sighed.

"Yes, it is out of the question, but my valet Huplick shall be present as a witness, and you can have your own maid with you, if you choose to send her on to Penzance in advance, ostensibly on some errand," urged Conyers. "Will you consent to this, Octavia?"

He waited in breathless suspense for her reply.

"Yes," she whispered, with seeming timidity. "The day after to-morrow, you say. It is very soon, Rollyn. I should like to have time to order a magnificent trousseau from Paris, but I suppose I must give that up."

"You can order your trousseau all the same, Octavia; you can write to-morrow, and the trousseau will arrive about the time we go up to town. That will be as well. And until the things arrive, we will stay at Cragthorpe and at Hawks' Cliff, enjoying our honeymoon."

Conyers's argument appeared to convince Miss Windsor. She yielded assent to all his wishes.

"Let us go in now," said the young man. "I want to declare our engagement to the earl."

He drew her arm in his, and they returned to the drawing-room.

They found Lord Hawkhurst and Mr. Callender waiting for them. Conyers led the girl forward to the earl, and said, with unmistakable triumph:

"My Lord, you will see that I have followed the promptings of my heart and your own expressed wishes. Permit me to present to you my promised wife."

The earl looked his amazement.

"This is quick work," he said, smiling. "I am very much pleased, Octavia; very much pleased, Rollyn. I hope you two will be happy. I am glad that the daughter of my old friend will be the mistress of Hawks' Cliff when I am gone."

He kissed Miss Windsor very gracefully, and congratulated Conyers with a genuine delight.

Mr. Callender offered his congratulations.

It was twelve o'clock when the Cragthorpe carriage was ordered and Conyers escorted Miss Windsor down the steps. He put her into the carriage carefully, tucking the rugs about her, and exacting a last salute.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONYERS'S VILLAINY PROSPERS.

Having won the consent of Miss Windsor to an immediate and private marriage, Dane Conyers permitted no scruples of conscience, no sense of honor, no fear of God or man, to stand in the way of the accomplishment of his villainous schemes.

He kept his valet with him until a late hour, consulting with him about his plans in the most confidential manner, but at last dismissed him. Then for hours Conyers paced his room, the prey of strangely conflicting emotions. His exultation in his successful second wooing, in his grand prospects, in the favor of the rich old earl, in his well-grounded expectaion of succeeding to the

Hawkhurst estates, varied strangely with spasms of remorse for his base abandonment of his wife.

He thought of her glorious beauty, her innocent faith and trust in him, her sweetness, her spirit, her pride, the purity and strength of her nature, and compared her in his own mind with the scheming, selfish heiress, and a groan burst from his lips, and he quickened his steps to an impetuous speed.

"Why are things never as we want them?" he muttered. "Poor Beryl! If she had only had birth and fortune! After all that has passed—notwithstanding that her beauty has nearly lured me to my ruin—I love her still. I love her! And I hate Miss Windsor. What a grotesque mockery it all is!"

Throughout the remainder of the night he continued to pace the floor, or to crouch before his dying fire remorseful yet exultant, blaming his untoward destiny for his own evil acts, yet inflexibly determined to secure the fortune he believed to be almost within his grasp. After breakfast the next morning, he set out ostensibly to visit Cragthorpe, Lord Hawkhurst watching his departure with a well-pleased smile.

"I like Desmond," thought the earl, "but it is a proof of Conyers's superiority that the heart of that pure, innocent girl was given to Conyers at once. *She* did not hesitate between them. She has her father's straightforward, truthful nature, and will be a fitting mistress for Hawks' Cliff. She will be as a daughter to me."

Conyers did not proceed immediately to Cragthorpe, but rode swiftly to Penzance, and proceeded to obtain his necessary marriage license. After a delay of some two hours, he was successful, and with the document in his pocket rode to Cragthorpe, in excellent spirits.

He found Miss Windsor in her drawing-room, with a look of anxiety on her face. She had been watching at a window for his coming, and sprang forward to meet him with an unlooked-for eagerness.

She was dressed in white, despite the November weather, her gown trailing over the rich carpet. She wore a sash of wide scarlet ribbon, a knot of scarlet at her throat, and red carved corals in her ears. Her black hair was gathered high upon her head in a fashionable dishevelment, and a short, crimped fringe of hair fell half way down her forehead. Her black eyes were shining, her face was flushed and eager. She was certainly handsome, but it was a hard, cold sort of beauty, which would degenerate into coarseness and boldness as she grew older, and Conyers recognized that fact even as he bestowed upon her a very lover-like greeting.

"Have you been to Penzance?" asked Miss Windsor, trying to speak carelessly, yet seeming but the more anxious.

"I am just come from there," was the response, as Conyers seated himself upon a sofa and drew the girl down beside him. "I have got the marriage license, Octavia. Surely you don't mean to withdraw from your agreement, do you?"

"I? Oh, no," said Miss Windsor, with an uneasy laugh. "I did not know but you—I mean I was afraid that something might happen to prevent our marriage. I've been writing letters all the morning, Rollyn. I have written to Worth and Pingat for the most elegant trousseau that can be invented. I mean to have everything that money can buy. I shall make hay while my sun shines."

"I don't understand. You speak as if something might happen to curtail your income in the future," said

Conyers. "My dear Octavia, you will retain full control over your own property after our marriage, and your slightest caprice shall be gratified."

"You are very good, Rollyn. I am going to buy the most superb jewels. I shall have some sent from London for my inspection; and I shall secure some India shawls and laces. You look as though you wondered at me. My mind is running upon finery this morning, I think. Now, how is the marriage to be managed?"

"I shall come to Cragthorpe to-morrow morning, as we planned, and we will go out ostensibly for a ride. We will go to Penzance and be married."

"But I can't be married in a riding-habit. I've thought of a charming plan. I will send my maid to-night—she is in my confidence—to Penzance, to the house of my dressmaker, with a box of clothing, which can be supposed to be sent for necessary alterations. In the morning, I will go directly to my dressmaker's, put on a suitable garb, and drive to church in a cab. You will be there to meet me, and all will go well."

Conyers remained at Cragthorpe several hours. Mr. Callender made his appearance during the afternoon, but seemed totally unconscious of the maneuvering of the young couple, and treated Conyers with marked consideration.

The young man took his leave at last, and returned to Hawks' Cliff in time to dress for dinner. He was particularly attentive to the earl throughout that evening, and won greatly upon Lord Hawkhurst. The next morning, after breakfast, he excused himself, and set out again for Cragthorpe.

He found Miss Windsor, attired in a long blue riding-habit, high silk hat and blue veil, awaiting him. She

was twirling a jeweled whip in her gauntleted hands, and was already impatient and ill at ease. She secretly feared lest something would happen even yet to prevent her marriage.

"Let me order your horse immediately, Octavia," said Conyers, touching the bell-pull. "We have a long ride before us. Is your uncle at home?"

"No, he went out a few minutes ago, saying he had business at Penzance. Oh, I hope we won't meet him!" said Miss Windsor. "I do hope he won't find us out in time to prevent our marriage. Do you know, Rollyn, uncle thinks I ought to marry a duke? The income of Cragthorpe is twenty thousand a year."

Conyers's face flushed. With twenty thousand a year of clear income he could live as he desired. He ordered Miss Windsor's horse with the air of a prince, and treated her with an actual tenderness as he led her out to the porch and assisted her to mount. They conversed little during the ride, and each drew a sigh of relief when they finally entered Penzance and took their way through the more quiet streets to the residence of Miss Windsor's dressmaker.

They parted here, the young lady entering the house. Conyers rode to a hotel and there left his horses. He procured a carriage and sent it to the temporary halting-place of Miss Windsor, and then proceeded to the church that had been agreed upon as the scene of the intended marriage.

The church was open, the pew-opener being busy within. Conyers hastened to the clergyman's dwelling, explained his errand, and by half-past eleven o'clock, the clergyman, his clerk, the sexton and one or two others were assembled in the dim old edifice, and waiting for the bride.

There was a witness present whom Conyers did not see. Mr. Callender occupied a corner in the shadow of a column, and remained silent and watchful.

At a quarter before twelve, a carriage rolled up to the church-door, and Miss Windsor, closely attended by her maid, alighted. Conyers was at the door watching for her, and gave her his arm and led her down the long aisle toward the altar.

A second carriage followed close upon the first, and the dressmaker, with one of her assistants, a showy-looking French woman, also entered the church.

Miss Windsor was in bridal array. A long, white silk gown, which she had had made in Paris for party use, served admirably as her wedding-dress, her *modiste* having added trimmings of point lace and orange-blossoms. She wore the usual wreath, and a long, fleecy white veil that fell about her like an enveloping mist.

The bitter mockery was over, and Beryl's husband was married to another woman.

The bridal couple passed into the vestry and signed the marriage-register. Conyers pressed a liberal fee into the clergyman's hand. Huplick slipped out of the church to summon a cab for the lady's maid, which should convey her back to Cragthorpe. The *modiste* and the remaining witnesses remained modestly aloof, for the bride was not a person to permit familiarity from any of them, even while she made use of them to carry out her own purposes.

Octavia, flushed and smiling, stood alone, buttoning on her long, white glove, and Conyers was in the act of approaching her after his aside with the clergyman, when a little stir occurred at the door of the vestry, and the uncle of the bride, Mr. Griffin Callender, entered the room.

The *modiste* stifled a little shriek of dismay ; the lady's maid trembled ; the clergyman looked surprised ; Conyers placed himself at Octavia's side, and smiled with careless defiance at the intruder ; while Octavia herself, not in the least startled or surprised, greeted her relative with an easy little nod.

Mr. Callender did not appear in the character of the angry guardian. He looked complacent, satisfied and well pleased with the situation of affairs. He stroked his long, sandy, Dundreary whiskers as he advanced smiling.

"So you've stolen a march upon me ?" he said, easily. "Well, young people will be young people. I know what young blood is myself. I have come to say 'Bless you, my children !' in the most approved stage manner. Octavia—my dear Mrs. Conyers—permit me to wish you happiness. Conyers, I congratulate you."

Mr. Callender kissed the bride, and held out his hand to the bridegroom, who clasped it in wondering surprise.

"How did you get wind of this ?" asked Conyers. "When did you arrive?"

"I witnessed your marriage. I was ensconced in one of the pews," said Mr. Callender, jocularly. "I happened to see you hurrying through the streets, and afterward saw Octavia in all that bridal finery in a carriage with her maid. Of course I guessed the truth at once. I followed her here and became a witness to the marriage. I had no idea you young people had so much spirit or were so deeply in love. You will return with us to Cragthorpe, I suppose, Mr. Conyers. You are master there now."

"I am glad you take our marriage so pleasantly," said Conyers. "Octavia and I were afraid you and Lord Hawkhurst would be angry at our escapade. But we

have only hastened our marriage by a few months ; that is all. And as you take the matter so easily, I am persuaded that the earl will do so, also."

"I don't know," said Mr. Callender, shaking his head. "Hawkhurst is a great stickler for forms and ceremonies, and he has a lion's own temper. But he's fond of Octavia, and you two ought to be able to make peace with him. I propose that you go to Hawks' Cliff and announce your marriage before going to Cragthorpe."

"We will do so," said Octavia. "I shall not know a minute's peace until I know what dear Lord Hawkhurst has to say to our marriage, Rollyn."

The young lady was oppressed with a sense of dread and anxiety in regard to the earl's possible reception of the news of the marriage, and Conyers experienced the same dread of meeting his noble kinsman, without, however, sharing Octavia's anxiety. With Cragthorpe as his own, he had little anxiety in regard to any man's displeasure.

"I dare say he will feel as I do, that you have been rash and foolish," smiled Mr. Callender ; "but, like me, he will forgive you. I have only one regret. I don't distrust you, Conyers, but there should have been marriage-settlements. Cragthorpe should have been secured to Octavia—but there's no use fretting now. I came over in the barouche. You must return in it. Shall we go now ?"

Conyers gave his bride his arm and led her from the church. The Cragthorpe barouche was in waiting at the door. Conyers assisted Octavia into the vehicle and took his place beside her, wrapping around her an Indian cashmere shawl, and placing over her bridal-wreath a hat and a dark veil, which the lady's maid produced. Mr. Callender took the opposite seat, with

his back to the horses; Huplick mounted the box, and the carriage drove away swiftly.

The lady's maid returned to the dressmaker's for her mistress's riding-attire, and thence proceeded to Cragthorpe in a cab.

Mr. Callender had not a reproach to utter during the long, rough drive to Hawks' Cliff. He was full of little jests and pleasantries, until they neared their destination, and then a deep gravity fell upon him, as it had already upon his companions.

"If it were not that Octavia is the daughter of the dearest friend he ever had, I should quite dread meeting the earl," said Mr. Callender, giving voice to the sentiment that was shared by his companions. "The truth is, Hawkhurst is a roaring lion when he is angry. He's one of those men who dare cut off their own right hand in a fit of rage."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PEARL OUT OF THE GUTTER.

Beryl found her life, as she became more used to it, inexpressively dreary. She performed her duties as daily governess to the young Ryans, at Brunswick Square, with the most conscientious care and fidelity. She was punctual to her engagements in all weathers. She learned to embroider well, and executed pillows and chair-stripes, which were left on sale at a West End bazaar, where immense supplies of such work were

exhibited by needy gentlewomen ; but the sales were infrequent, and scarcely repaid the cost of the materials. Women's work of all kinds seemed a drug in the market.

It is true that she did not live quite upon a guinea a week. She had money remaining from the sale of her trinkets in Switzerland, but she husbanded this small fund for "a rainy day," for more pressing needs, and as the means of forwarding her life purpose. She used as little of this money as possible. Her fare was Lenten all the time. She gave herself no relaxation, had no amusements, but walked the weary treadmill of her daily duties until her young soul sickened even of life.

It happened one Saturday afternoon that a desolate rain was falling, and a visit to Hyde Park would have been fruitless. There would be no carriages out on a day like this, when the gas-lights beamed in sickly fashion all day in the shops, and a gray desolation brooded like a nightmare over the mighty town. Beryl's fire was not lighted. The price of coal had gone up latterly, and Mrs. Toploft, having read an essay by some scientific alarmist that the coal deposits of England would at a certain appointed date fail utterly and altogether, had instituted a rigorous economy of coal in her household, in order to put off the day of national calamily.

On her return from Brunswick Square she ate her luncheon—an unbuttered roll. Then she resumed her rubber overshoes, her long, shrouding blue waterproof sacque and cape, her round, gray straw hat, her gloves and umbrella, and went out again into the wet streets.

She had a destination—the bazaar where her work was exhibited—and she walked briskly along the Strand to Trafalgar Square and on to Regent street, unmindful

of the rain. It was a long walk, but she gave no thought to her weariness.

But, on reaching the bazaar, she found that her work was not sold. All her little plans vanished like smoke into thin air. She turned away, not disheartened—she had been used to disappointments, and had ceased to wonder at them; she would have wondered at good fortune now—and plunged again into the street.

She did not walk briskly now, but looked into the shops as she passed, and scanned pieces of new music in windows, and read a whole page in a booksellers' window, and beguiled her walk with these small pleasures, and so drifted back again into Regent street.

The air was very thick and murky. The rain was like a great veil. One could not see a rod in advance. A few gentlemen were hurrying along; a few forlorn beggar-women with children were huddled under doorways; a few working-women walked discreetly, sheltered under umbrellas. Cabs rattled through the streets, bearing people from railway stations, from business places, from visitings.

Beryl stood upon a street-corner, watching an opportunity to cross. Presently, when a favorable opportunity occurred, she set out on her perilous journey across the street. There was no halting-place midway, as is so frequently the case in London, and she was obliged to look first one way and then another, to assure herself that no danger threatened.

She was half-way across when three or four cabs, approaching from opposite directions, came swiftly toward her out of the gray, wet gloom. Two cabmen cried out to her furiously at the same moment to look out. Beryl started to run. Her foot slipped upon the

muddy, slippery pavement, her umbrella went whirling out of her hand, and she fell headlong to the ground.

Before she could recover herself, a cab-horse was so near that her unaided escape was impossible. The cab-driver, engaged in an altercation with another driver, did not see her. A moment more and she would have been a crushed and shapeless mass under the horse's feet, but a young man passing along the street had witnessed her fall and bounded forward with a lion-bound to her rescue. As quick as a flash, he seized the cab-horse by the bit and reared him back upon his haunches. Then he lifted the girl to her feet and carried her to the sidewalk.

The incident had scarcely occupied five seconds. It had transpired so quickly that Beryl had had no time to perceive her peril before she was rescued.

The grip of her preserver upon the horse's bit had been a grip of steel. In carrying her to the sidewalk he bore her weight with apparent ease, as if she had been an infant. He sat her down upon the walk, continuing to support her, for her face was deathly white and she looked faint and ill.

Her hat hung upon the back of her neck, her small head, covered closely with little red curls, was bare, but she had never looked lovelier than now in her terror and distress. Her transparent complexion, her big, vivid brown eyes glowing like stars, her tender, exquisite mouth—all made up a beautiful picture as lovely as beautiful. Her rescuer thought he had never seen a being half so lovely.

"Are you faint?" he asked. "Let me take you into one of these shops?"

His voice was low and gentlemanly. Beryl was con-

scious of a feeling of surprise, and looked at him more earnestly. She saw a slender, tall young gentleman, with white hands, a fair, handsome face, and an air of well-bred languor and indolence. Was this her rescuer, whose quick, strong grip had saved her from probable death?

"I am not hurt; I am not faint," she answered in a fluttering voice. "I thank you for your great kindness."

She would have moved away, but he detained her gently, and said:

"You tremble as if you had an ague. You are not able to walk. There is an empty cab. I will send you home in it."

He signaled the cab, which drew up at the curbstone.

Beryl demurred, declining the vehicle, saying that she could easily walk. He believed that poverty was the cause of her refusal to use the cab, and he saw that she was not able really to walk a single block unaided. She had met with a nervous shock, and should be got home as soon as possible.

"I shall go to my lodgings in the cab," he said, courteously, "and I beg you will allow me to set you down at your own home. My name is Noble Desmond. Allow me to perform the service of a brother in this emergency."

He was so courteous, so respectful, that Beryl experienced no distrust of him. She felt weak and ill also, and so allowed him to help her into the cab.

"What address?"

"Arundel street, Strand."

Desmond closed the door, and mounted the box with the driver. Beryl sank back upon the seat and closed her eyes in faintness.

Arundel street, Strand, was gained in due course of time, and the cab stopped, and Desmond alighted, came to the door, and asked the number of the house. Beryl told him. He walked to the number designated, arriving in time to assist Beryl up the steps and to ring the knocker of Mrs. Toploft's lodging-house.

"You are very kind," said Beryl. "I thank you more than I can express for your kindness to me, Mr. Desmond."

The sound of shuffling feet was heard in the passage within leading to the door.

"Will you not tell me your name?" asked Desmond, courteously, yet with kindly evident interest.

"My name is Beryl Star," the girl answered; "Miss Star."

The housemaid opened the door. Desmond waited until Beryl had vanished into the house. Then he descended the steps, gave his address to the cabman, and entered the vehicle.

"Miss Star!" he repeated. "Beryl Star! I never believed in love at first sight before. How little I thought, when I spoke of picking up a pearl out of the gutter, that I should literally find a pearl of price in the mud of Regent street. I have found my destiny at last. I shall marry this beautiful Beryl Star, or," he added, with the solemnity of a perfect conviction, "I shall go to my grave unwedded."

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR CLEW.

Beryl made her way up-stairs to her own chilly, cheerless room, and flung herself upon her couch. No one came near her. For an hour she lay quietly, resting after her adventure, but she finally arose, her teeth chattering, and removed her uncomfortable garments, putting on dry ones, and sat down at the corner of her hearth.

"I had a narrow escape," she thought, with a shudder. "I shall remember Noble Desmond while I live. He looked as if his name indicated his nature."

In the evening, another event happened in Beryl's life. She was sitting grave and thoughtful, when a knock sounded upon her door, and Mrs. Toploft entered, and proceeded to explain :

"You see, miss, I am going out of the lodging-house business. I am going to leave England."

Beryl looked her surprise.

"Where are you going ?" she inquired.

"To Australia, miss," said Mrs. Toploft, in a tone half of triumph, half of regret. "Did I ever tell you about my two sons ? They are great, strong, rough fellows, and are sheep farmers in Australia. They have got a good house apiece, and a half-dozen children apiece also. John—he's my youngest-born—he's just lost his wife, and his children are all young, and he begs me to come out to him, and bring up his children for

him, and make a home for him and for them. It's my duty to go. I shall sell the lease of this house. The lease has only a year to run, and I know a person who wants to take it off my hands. The furniture I shall send to the auction-rooms. I am not troubled about any of my lodgers but you."

"Can I not stay on here with your successor, Mrs. Toploft?" inquired Beryl.

"Oh, dear, no. The person who wants to take the house is the person next door. She keeps chambers for gentlemen, there's not a lady in her house. I know she would refuse to keep you, even if it were a proper place for you among so many gentlemen. How would you like the neighborhood of Oxford street? I know of lodgings just out of Oxford street that would suit you exactly, but for the sum you pay here you would only get an attic there."

"If I must leave this house, Mrs. Toploft, I shall be very grateful to you for finding me any honest shelter," said Beryl. "I think I should like the neighborhood of Oxford street."

"Then I'll speak to Mrs. Margle about a room for you to-morrow," said Mrs. Toploft, decidedly. "She's a good, honest woman. She was a housekeeper many years in very good families, and laid up a handsome bit of money. She's got a suite of rooms, well-furnished, that they let for five guineas a week. She knows so many rich families, that she may be able to get you a better situation than your present one. I don't know of a better place for you."

"Shall you leave England very soon?"

"I shall close out my furniture this week. I shall leave England within a fortnight. It's a sudden start,



"I AM NOT HURT. I AM NOT FAINT," SHE ANSWERED.—*See Page* 141.

miss, but England can't hold me, now that I know how much my poor boy wants me."

Beryl and Mrs. Toploft went in a cab to inspect the new lodging.

The house in question was in a quiet street opening out of Oxford street, and was a respectable brick dwelling of four stories. Mrs. Toploft sounded the brightly-polished knocker, and the visitors were admitted by a smart housemaid. Mrs. Margle, the lodging-house keeper, a spare woman, past middle age, and wearing a cap, presently appeared. Mrs. Toploft performed the ceremony of introduction.

The candle light fell full upon Beryl's face, as with gentle courtesy she acknowledged the introduction. But Mrs. Margle stared at her with wide-open eyes, almost as if the girl had been a ghost.

"Who—who did you say?" she asked. "What name, Mrs. Toploft?"

"'Miss Star,'" said Mrs. Toploft. "She is a very nice young lady, Mrs. Margle, and I'll vouch for her. She is a relative of the Stars of Surrey."

"I beg pardon," said Mrs. Margle, "but you remind me of a young lady I knew once, many years ago. I was her housekeeper—poor dear!—at St. John's Wood. Your eyes are the very copy of hers."

A sudden agitation made Beryl's heart beat wildly, but her voice was calm and steady as she asked:

"How long ago was that, Mrs. Margle?"

"It's eighteen years since I entered her service; it's a little over seventeen years since I left it."

A sense of suffocation came upon Beryl. Had she stumbled upon a clew to her mother's secret history during that year before Beryl's birth? She believed that Providence had led her to this house, and that a

solution to the mystery of poor Jenny Star's life might possibly rest in the keeping of this very woman.

"Will you go up and look at your room, Miss Star?" asked Mrs. Margle.

The girl assented. Terms were soon arranged, and it was agreed that Beryl should take possession of her room on the morrow.

"I hope I shall be a pleasant reminder to you of the lady you once served, Mrs. Margle," said the young girl, smiling, yet anxious. "Were you fond of her?"

"Very. She was sweet-spoken, and yet had a dignity that showed her the true lady," said Mrs. Margle. "She looked like you, but her hair was different in color. The resemblance is curious, but not at all uncommon. Among all the people in the world it would be odd if no two were alike. Possibly you may be of her kin, though. Her name was Mrs. Gray."

"I do not know any one of that name," said Beryl. "Did you know her given name?"

"I heard her husband call her Jenny, sometimes."

Beryl trembled and her face whitened.

She knew now beyond all peradventure that she was on the right track—that the Mrs. Gray of St. John's Wood was her own dead young mother. Yet she held in her emotions with a stern and rare self-control, and asked very quietly:

"Was she married, Mrs. Margle?"

"Yes; I called her Mrs. Gray. That was the name she was known by at Clematis Villa. The colonel, Mrs. Gray's husband, was Colonel Gray, who fairly worshiped her; but he was proud as Lucifer, and they quarreled sometimes terribly. But next day he always brought a peace-offering of jewelry or some such thing, and petted her until she smiled again. I was paid a good salary,

and kept my eyes and ears well closed ; but something was wrong in the relations of the master and mistress, and one night she had a last quarrel with him, and fled out of the house like a mad creature, and I never saw her again. Whether she's living or dead I don't know."

"A strange story," said the girl, in a trembling voice. "Did Colonel Gray disappear also ?"

"No ; he sought for her everywhere. He set me and the two servants to look for her. He thought she had killed herself, yet made us continue the search. One day, when we were all out, she came back to the villa, admitted herself with the key she had always kept in her pocket, and carried away her clothes and jewels in a cab which she had in waiting. One of the neighbors saw her enter the house and go out again, but could give no clew to the direction she had taken in departing. The cabman could not be traced."

"Now, Mrs. Margle," said Mrs. Toploft, argumentatively, "that couple were not respectable. Did you ever see Mrs. Gray's marriage lines ?"

"No ; but she was a lady, and thought herself the colonel's wife. My theory has always been," said Mrs. Margle, "that there had been a mock marriage between them, and she had taken it for genuine. I did see her get on her knees to him once—they didn't know I saw them, and the seeing was quite by accident—and heard her implore him to acknowledge her as his wife, for the sake of her poor father and her dear brother. But something she said angered him, and he got into one of his rages, and told her he would never own his low-born wife. And yet he seemed to worship her. I am sure that she was the victim of a mock marriage."

"What became of Colonel Gray ?" asked Beryl, in

low, choked tones. "What did he do after her disappearance?"

"He kept on the villa for six months, and came out to it once a week to see if she had been back again; but she never came—at least, we never saw her; and at last he was ordered out to India with his regiment, and he gave up the house and dismissed the servants, and went away quite broken-hearted. I have never seen him from that day to this. I presume he died in India."

"And that is all you know of the story?" inquired Mrs. Toploft, disappointedly.

"That is all. But I should like to know what became of her," sighed Mrs. Margle.

Beryl arose, a prolongation of conversation upon this subject becoming insupportable under her present excitement. Mrs. Toploft arose, also, and they took their leave.

The next day, Beryl entered into possession of her new home.

It will be remembered that among the jewels Mr. Star had given her during her brief visit to Starwood had been a peculiar pendant to attach to a necklace, being a rare pigeon's-blood ruby of peculiar shape and well-marked. This had been found among the effects of Jenny Star, and was of great value, and appeared to be a family heirloom of considerable age. Beryl had worn this pendant under the folds of her dress since her uncle had given it to her, but upon this first night in her new lodging she wore it outside her dress in a faint hope that Mrs. Margle would see it and recognize it.

She had eaten her supper, the study-lamp was lighted, shedding a mellow glow around, the fire burned brightly, and the red gleams streamed out upon the carpet, when

Mrs. Margle ascended the stairs to call upon her new lodger. Beryl gave her admittance and begged her to be seated. The invitation being accepted, the girl sat down in the full glow of the light and waited with trembling expectancy.

But Mrs. Margle paid no heed to the ornament. It was not until she had discussed Mrs. Toploft and her affairs with critical attention, and had told of various great families that she had lived in, that she even noticed the ruddy jewel, and then she said carelessly :

"That's a pretty locket of yours, Miss Star. It shines and glows like a living coal."

"Would you like to see it ?" asked the girl.

She stepped forward to exhibit it. Mrs. Margle gave a curious glance at the jewel, then started and uttered a loud, strange cry.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Margle ?" inquired Beryl. "Have you ever seen it before ?"

"A hundred times. It was hers—Mrs. Gray's. How came it in your possession, Miss Star ? The colonel gave it to her before he brought her to Clematis Villa, and I heard her say he had given it to her as a wedding-gift. She thought the world of it."

"Is there no mistake ? Are you sure it was this jewel ?"

"Sure ? I can swear to it in any court in the land. I have had it in my hands many times. I was right ; your likeness to her means something. What relation was Mrs. Gray to you ?"

"She was my mother !"

"What ! She your mother !"

"Yes, she was my mother. I must have been born only a few weeks after she fled from Clematis Villa."

"And she—where is she ?"

"She died at my birth."

Mrs. Margle wiped her eyes. Amazement and a host of other emotions struggled within her for the mastery. At last she asked:

"How is it you do not bear your father's name?"

"Was that his name? Was his real name Gray?"

"I don't know—I think not."

"Then I will keep the name my mother bore in her innocent girlhood. I am glad to hear that she thought herself his wife. She never told her story to her kindred, and they believed the worst of her. Her brother curses her memory to-day," said Beryl, passionately. "I hope that Colonel Gray lives—I will not call him father—and that some day I shall meet him face to face. There is a just God, and some day I know I shall see Colonel Gray and know him! And he shall know me also. I pray God the day of our meeting be near at hand!"

CHAPTER XX.

PROSPEROUS.

Octavia's face was pale as she descended from the barouche in the carriage-porch at Hawks' Cliff and was assisted up the steps by Conyers. Mr. Callender followed slowly, anxious as to their reception by Lord Hawkhurst, and deeming it better to remain in the background until the first explosion of the earl's wrath had passed over. A servant opened the house-door before

they reached it, and the couple advanced into the baronial hall of the castle.

"Where is Lord Hawkhurst, Peters?" asked Conyers, in a low voice.

"In the library, sir," replied the servant.

"Alone, Peters?"

The servant replied in the affirmative, and took a step in the direction of the library.

"Don't announce us, Peters," said Conyers. "We will announce ourselves. Courage, Octavia. You are actually pale. Take my arm."

He drew her arm in his, and led her down the grand old hall toward the arched double-doors opening into the library. He felt her tremble.

The great library was dim and full of dusky shadows, although it was yet early afternoon. As the door opened the earl looked up, frowning. The frown changed to a look of surprise as he recognized the intruders. He arose and came toward them with a smile of welcome.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Windsor," he said, with pleasant courtesy. "I am very glad indeed to see you. Are you masquerading?" and he glanced at her bridal attire.

"Oh, my Lord!" said Octavia, tremblingly; "we—I—"

"We are not masquerading, my Lord," said Conyers, with a smile. "We are only two very ardent young people who love each other dearly. You gave your consent to our marriage, and so did Mr. Callender, and so Octavia and I have been romantic enough to go away by ourselves and quietly get married."

"What!"

"Allow me, my Lord, to present my wife, Mrs. Rollyn Conyers."

"Your wife? You are married?"

"Yes, my Lord. We were married at Penzance, in church, this morning. We are just come from church."

Lord Hawkhurst looked amazed. His face grew redder than his hair. An angry indignation glittered in his eyes.

"Is this a miserable joke?" he demanded. "Or is it a more miserable truth? Have you taken your bride in this sneaking fashion, Conyers, as if you dared not give her freedom long enough to prepare for a suitable bridal? I call the proceeding that of a selfish sneak!"

Conyers's face flushed, but he controlled his temper.

"Octavia loves me, and I love her," he said. "What's the use of our waiting months to prepare a trousseau and issue bridal cards and all that rubbish? We don't care for the congratulations of people whom we don't know. Our marriage has not been secret. It is known all over Penzance by this time. We did not intend it to be secret. It was simply quiet, and all we need to complete our happiness is your kind approval of our little escapade."

"Approval! Little escapade!" the earl raged.

"You know," urged Conyers, "that you approved our betrothal. Why do you not approve our marriage?"

"Why, you haven't known each other a fortnight! Of course I approved your betrothal, but one would suppose you would desire to study each other's character, to get better acquainted, to—bah! there's no fool like a young fool, whatever the proverb says. I regard this hasty marriage, contracted without my knowledge, as an act of the grossest disrespect to me. By Jove! I have a good mind never to see either of you again. I

thought Tom Windsor's daughter a model of feminine virtues, but women are fools! As for you, Conyers—to take advantage of an innocent young girl's love for you to lead her into such a hurried marriage as this—it was the act of a scheming, pitiful scoundrel, and I want nothing more to do with you. You will take your departure at once."

The earl was frightful to look upon in his passionate wrath. His face flamed, his keen eyes glittered like flashing sword-blades. His massive features were convulsed with his rage.

Conyers smiled at his lordship's excessive anger.

"Very well, my Lord," he said, coolly. "I will go to my own home of Cragthorpe. Come, Octavia."

"Go!" said the earl, hoarsely. "Let me never see your face again. You need not hope to be my heir."

Conyers turned to depart, but Octavia, knowing all that depended upon a reconciliation with the earl, broke from Conyers's hand and ran to the earl, and actually threw herself at his feet, her face wet with her tears.

"Oh, my Lord!" she pleaded, "don't be angry with us! We did not think you would be offended with us. Forgive us, my Lord; pray forgive us, for my father's sake! For the sake of the love he bore you, look kindly upon his daughter!"

The earl's face softened. He made as if to lift up the kneeling woman, but Octavia clung to his knees in an agony Conyers could not understand. She realized that wealth and splendor, all that she hoped for or desired in life, were dependent upon her restoration to Lord Hawkhurst's favor, and she was not one to shrink even from self-abasement when that would best serve her purpose.

"We have been rash and foolish," she continued, weeping; "but you consented to our marriage, you know. Dear Lord Hawkhurst, uncle Griffin has forgiven us; will not you? It is Tom Windsor's daughter who kneels to you and begs you for his sake to forgive and love his child!"

The appeal was successful. The earl's rages were always quickly spent. He had a generous, chivalrous nature at bottom, and he lifted the girl now in his brawny arms and kissed her.

Conyers approached, pleased and radiant.

"Forgive me, also, my Lord," he said, holding out his hand. "We thought our hurried marriage would please you. I have won the heiress of Cragthorpe, as you bade me do, and if your former desire still remains, you can cause her estate some day to be united to that of Hawks' Cliff."

The earl accepted his kinsman's hand.

Mr. Callender now made an opportune entrance, and the earl was presently restored to a perfect good humor. Smiles replaced the bride's tears, and a pleasant scene succeeded.

"You must all remain to dine with me," said Lord Hawkhurst. "I shall not let you return to Cragthorpe until to-morrow."

"The carriage is waiting to take our rash young pair home to Cragthorpe," said Mr. Callender, smiling. "I happened into the church at Penzance in time to witness the marriage, but too late to interrupt it if I had wished to do so. And after all, Lord Hawkhurst, so long as they were betrothed with our consent, what does it matter whether they are married quietly or with pomp and ceremony, so long as they please themselves, and

whether they marry now or some months hence? I am perfectly satisfied and well pleased."

"We will make the best of it," said the earl. "But why must you all return to Cragthorpe to-day?"

"Because, when I learned of the marriage," said Mr. Callender, smoothly, "I made up my mind to approve it—since it would do no good now to show disapproval—and sent a mounted messenger to Cragthorpe with orders that a wedding-breakfast should be prepared as quickly as possible. The tenantry have heard the joyful news, and I shall have an impromptu ball at Cragthorpe this evening. The heiress of the Windsors must not be married with no one to make merry or wish her happiness. Come home with us, my Lord, and make merry with us."

Lord Hawkhurst was prevailed upon to consent to join in the bridal festivities, and promised to follow the bridal-party to Cragthorpe in his own carriage.

Conyers brought in Octavia's shawl and hat, and assisted her to envelop herself closely against the chilly weather. The visitors then took their leave.

The drive to Cragthorpe was a merry one, every one of the three schemers exulting in the success of his and her own private plans.

It was nearly four o'clock when they drove into the home-grounds of Octavia's residence, yet the darkness was already falling over land and sea. Everything worked smoothly to the close of the wedding festivities. It was nearly midnight when the sound of music died out of the house, and the last humble guest had taken his departure.

Lord Hawkhurst, resisting all entreaties to remain all night, caused his carriage to be ordered and prepared

for his departure. He stood in the drawing-room, ruddy and smiling, and said benignantly :

"Octavia, Conyers, I regret my harshness of to-day. I am pleased, after all, with your marriage. Shall you go away on a bridal tour?"

"No," answered Octavia. "We desire to remain here until the London season opens. Then we will go to town. I suppose we must get a house there."

"I intend to occupy my own town-house during this season," said Lord Hawkhurst, graciously. "Conyers is to be my heir, and I beg you both to establish yourselves with me. Octavia, will you be mistress of my house during the fashionable season, and brighten my lonely life with your gentle presence?"

Octavia yielded a joyful assent. Her schemes were indeed prospering. She expressed her thanks warmly, and the earl, in a glow of pleasure, took his leave.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN PARK LANE.

The marriage of Miss Windsor, of Cragthorpe, to Rollyn Conyers, Esq., was duly announced in the court newspapers, and also in the local Cornish journals. The best country families called upon the newly-married couple. A round of festivities followed. On Christmas-eve Conyers and his new bride gave a grand dinner at Cragthorpe, followed by a ball at which the best county families were well represented. There was a gay sprinkling of uniforms, the officers of a dashing regi-

ment stationed at a neighboring town being present in force.

Early in January, the Hawks' Cliff house-steward went up to town with a staff of servants to prepare Hawkhurst House for occupancy. He employed skilful decorators and upholsterers, and himself superintended the work, so that before the end of the month the house was in fine order, and the earl had arrived and taken up his quarters in it.

Hawkhurst House was a handsome double dwelling in Park Lane. A suite immediately above the drawing-room had been prepared for the occupancy of Conyers and Octavia, and during the first week of February they came up to town and established themselves in it.

Upon the third day of her residence in town, about the middle of the afternoon, Octavia, in full carriage-costume of olive-green velvet and silver-fox furs, was seated in her boudoir alone. The carriage had been ordered, and she was expecting to hear it announced. A step was heard on the marble stair in the hall, approaching her door. She looked up expectantly. A knock was sounded on her door. In answer to her bidding, the door opened, and Mr. Callender entered the room.

"Is it you Uncle Griffin?" said Octavia, not rising. "I thought it was some one to announce the carriage. But it's not quite time," she added, with a glance at the small ormolu clock. "Why did you not send a servant up to tell me you were here?"

"I preferred to announce myself," said Mr. Callender, looking about him. "I wanted to see you alone and secure from interruption. Has the earl said anything about making his will since you came up to town?"

"Not a word; but he treats Rollyn and me as his

heirs. He promised to make his will in our favor ; he will keep his word."

"Unless he discovers that he has been deceived by you. I know him well. He has gigantic faults of pride and temper, but he is incapable of a lie or of a dishonorable act, and he hates both with all his soul. Now, if he finds out that you knew of your uncle's existence before you married, that you made haste to marry to secure a home and position, he is quite likely to accuse you of dishonorable conduct, and set you adrift, along with your husband. You must persuade him to make his will at once."

"*I* must! How can I? He is only fifty years of age, in the very prime of life and strength. How would he take such a suggestion from me?"

"Perhaps it would be better for me to speak to him on the subject," said Mr. Callender, thoughtfully. "I am persuaded it would, upon reflection. He can't impute bad motives to me. He must also make a settlement upon Conyers at once, beyond the power of his caprice to change. I will see Hawkhurst on these points this very evening, as I am to dine here. Your part must be then simply to win his love. Like most red-haired people, he is warm-hearted, generous, impulsive. Play the daughter to him. Hang about him ; pet him ; win his love ; so that when the worst comes, he'll be your best friend. You're a perfect cat, Octavia ; you can purr or scratch as the humor takes you. Purr upon him."

Octavia's face clouded.

"Have you heard from Canada again?" she whispered.

"Yes, I had a letter to-day."

"And he is now on his way home?"

"No, not yet. He has been very ill of fever, in a little backwoods hamlet, and has barely escaped death. Think of that, Octavia. How near you have been to the actual ownership of Cragthorpe, after all! He was saved only by the most devoted nursing from a kind old French woman, and a sister of mercy whom she had summoned. He was not able to sit up when he wrote. He thinks he will hardly dare undertake the voyage home before spring—say in April."

"Two months' reprieve," said Octavia, with a long breath of relief.

"In two months' time you must have made yourself secure here, and you can do it. I have often thought you the most artful of women; prove yourself such now. Here is your uncle Windsor's letter. Read it, and the patronizing allusion to yourself at the conclusion, and then realize how much depends upon prompt movement. Lord Hawkhurst must be won to make his will before he ever discovers your scheming."

Mr. Callender drew out a letter from his note-book and handed it to his niece. Octavia seized and opened it, her eyes eagerly scanning its contents; her face betrayed agitation, bitterness and chagrin, as she read how near her uncle had been unto death, how narrowly she had escaped being owner of Cragthorpe, after all.

She was in the midst of the perusal of the letter when the door opened abruptly, and Conyers entered the room.

With the instinct of secretiveness, Octavia thrust the letter hurriedly into her pocket.

Conyers marked the movement and looked suspiciously from his wife to her uncle and back again.

"Octavia," he said, coolly, "your carriage awaits you. I shall drive with you in the park. I have, perhaps,

intruded upon a secret conference," he added. "Shall I order the carriage back to the news and relieve you of my company?"

"By no means," said Octavia, rising. "I am quite ready. Uncle Griffin, you will drive with us?"

She withdrew the crumpled letter from her pocket, and placed it in Mr. Callender's hands, Conyers watching her still suspiciously. Callender bestowed the letter in his pocket and opened the door for his niece to pass out.

The three descended the stairs, entered the carriage and drove slowly down the street toward Piccadilly. They were all silent, Mr. Callender pretending to look for acquaintances, but secretly watching the young couple opposite him, Conyers gloomy and thoughtful, and Octavia with a smile on her lips and an anxious contraction of her brows in odd contrast to the false smile.

They performed the customary drive through the park and returned to Hawkhurst House in time to dress for dinner.

Dinner was over soon after nine o'clock, and a little later Conyers departed to his club, having already secured membership in a West End club. The earl was due at the House of Lords somewhere about midnight, and proposed spending an hour before that at a political club he much frequented. It was his custom to smoke a cigar after dinner, and having consulted his watch, he invited Mr. Callender to accompany him to his smoking-room and join him in his proposed indulgence.

This afforded the opportunity Octavia's uncle and fellow-conspirator desired. He accepted the invitation briskly, and followed the earl in time to escape certain fashionable visitors who called upon Octavia.

"OH, MY LORD!" SHE PLEADED, "DON'T BE ANGRY WITH US."—*See Page* 153.

Lord Hawkhurst motioned his guest to be seated, and sank down into a lounging-chair by the central table. The gaslight glowed softly through the shade of the argand lamp. The windows were curtained. The earl unlocked a square coffer of bronze upon the table, and displayed a store of his favorite cigars. Extracting one, he pushed the coffer nearer Mr. Callender, who followed his example. An exquisite little bronze statuette of a London match-girl offered a supply of matches, and both cigars were presently alight, and the earl leaned back in his chair, grave and thoughtful, the incarnation of luxurious ease. Callender regarded his gigantic proportions, his red beard, his shaggy red brows and hair, for some minutes before speaking.

"Octavia seems to feel at home here already, my Lord," he observed, withdrawing his cigar from his mouth, and regarding its fiery tip contemplatively. "I think she will be a success in society ; she's one of those showy, handsome creatures who attract men as a candle attracts moths. She was quite a belle at the German spas last summer. And yet, despite her social successes, she is one of those loving, gentle women who brighten a man's dull hours, make home happy, and are the tenderest nurses in illness. She was telling me to-day, the dear child, that she looked upon you as her father, and that the love she would have felt for her own father, if he had lived, she now felt for you. She cannot forget that you were his chosen and intimate friend."

The earl's face flushed up with pleasure, and he answered, in a gratified voice :

"I am glad to hear it. I prize the affection she has given me, and I assure you that I return it. I don't know much about women, but I reverence a good woman. I always felt a tenderness for my old friend

Windsor's daughter, and I am sure that she has inherited his noblest qualities. Her presence in my house will make my age less dreary than I had anticipated."

"Your age, my Lord! Why, you are only fifty, and as hale and vigorous as most men at five-and-twenty! You are in the prime of your intellect, strength and health. There's many a noble lady—many a high-born girl, in her teens—who would gladly devote her life to you as your wife. With your wealth you can contract any alliance short of one with royalty—although nowadays there seems to be no bar against even that. Octavia's affection will be set aside in time, perhaps, by a warmer love. At your age a man does not relinquish thoughts of marriage."

"I relinquished thoughts of that nature many years ago," said the earl, frowning, his manner chilling. "I shall never marry again, and I beg you never to allude to the subject again, Callender. My life looks to you successful. I am a noted statesman; I have great political influence; men fawn upon me; I have vast riches, houses and lands; I have a tenantry over whom I reign with more of power than belongs to many a petty German prince; and yet I am not happy. The worm 'remorse' is always gnawing at my heart. I have done that for which I could weep tears of blood. And I am going down to my grave childless, with no heir of my body to all my wealth, or to the name to which I have added luster—no child to weep for me when I am gone. I should like to have been a link in the great chain of Hawkhursts, to have had a child of my own to succeed me. Sometimes I think of what might have been if I had had a son or a daughter—a son to be proud of, to share my ambitions and hopes, to carry out my plans

or a daughter to love me, to cling to me, to make my home happy."

He drew a heavier sigh, and his flushed cheeks paled. Callender had never seen the stern, rugged-faced earl in one of these moods, and could not well conceal his surprise. But he replied with apparent warm sympathy :

"These longings find gratification at last, my Lord. The son who will share your ambitions and carry out your plans is found in Rollyn Conyers. And the daughter who will love and cling to you is the daughter of your old friend Windsor."

The earl bowed assent.

"Conyers has carried out your wishes to the letter," pursued Callender, "having married the heiress of Cragthorpe. I remember that you agreed to make him your heir—at least, to be more accurate, you declared an intention to that effect. Octavia's hasty marriage prevented the possibility of securing her fortune to herself, and her revenues are spent as freely by her husband as by herself. As Conyers is to be the heir to your wealth as well as to your title, would it not be well to bestow upon him some fixed annual allowance, such as you would grant your son ?"

Lord Hawkhurst aroused himself and assumed a more upright position. His eyes lost their remorseful sadness and resumed their usual glittering keenness. He put from him in an instant all vestige of emotion, and was again the cool, hard-headed, polite and self-possessed man of the world.

"Conyers has an income of his own that ought to suffice for his support," he said. "He has only himself to provide for, you know, Callender. Octavia's income shall be set apart for her own use, although it is too late

now to effect a settlement of it upon her in due form of law."

Callender, realizing upon how slight tenure his niece held her income, knowing how soon the larger portion would be wrested from her, said hastily:

"Conyers has but eight hundred a year. He will belong to a club, he will keep a thoroughbred for a park hack, he will have hunters in the country, he will keep a yacht—all young men of his rank do these things—and his income is frightfully inadequate to such great demands. You will, I trust, live many years yet. You come of a long-lived race, and will doubtless live to be ninety years of age. During the next forty years, then, shall Conyers deny himself the pleasures of young men of his rank and expectations, or shall he live upon his wife? Shall she pay for his pleasures, educate their children, and spend her own money in the thousand and one ways necessary to the conduct of a household, and yet which properly her husband ought to provide for?"

"Your remarks are just," said Lord Hawkhurst. "I had given thought to these things before. I will make no promises and come to no decision as to the allowance I will make Conyers until after I shall have seen my lawyer, but I will do something for him. I will see my lawyer to-morrow."

Callender's eyes gleamed. So much gained!

"Pardon me," he said; "there is one thing more. The young people do not know that I am speaking to you in their behalf, but as the uncle and former guardian of my imprudent Octavia, it is my duty to speak still further. I told you that I hoped you would live to a great old age. I am sure that you will. With your magnificent vitality you can almost set disease and mortality at defiance; and yet life is uncertain. You

may die within a year. You declare an intention of making Conyers your heir. Forgive me if I seem intrusive or officious, while I am only anxious to secure the accomplishment of your own wishes. Why not make your will, my Lord, and so put it beyond the power of any accident to beggar this favorite young kinsman of yours? Why not make your will without delay, and constitute the descendants of your old friend Windsor the inheritors of all your wealth?"

The earl looked startled, but not displeased. He dropped the stump of his cigar into the bronze ash-receiver after a thoughtful fashion, and finally said, in a decisive voice:

"You are right. Life is uncertain. I will attend to this matter at one. I will make my will to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. MARGLE'S NEW LODGER.

Beryl had discovered a clew to her mother's hidden history. She now knew that her mother, whose name lay under foulest reproach, and whose body was deemed unworthy to rest beside those of her kindred, had been known during that one brief year before Beryl's birth as Mrs. Gray, wife of Colonel Gray, of the Indian army, and had been the honored mistress of a villa in St. John's Wood.

The next day she proceeded to Brunswick Square, as usual; but Mrs. Ryan, having decided to spend the day

with her children at Sydenham, and not caring to bear the expenses of the governess, patronizingly granted her a holiday.

Beryl walked homeward with fleet steps, rejoicing in her unwonted freedom. She halted at a large book-shop in Oxford street, and requested to be allowed to look over an army-list. The request was granted, and she turned over the book leaves with a trembling hand. The name of Gray was found to be not uncommon, but there was no Colonel Gray belonging to an Indian regiment who could possibly have belonged to such a regiment seventeen years before.

"I should have one of the old army-lists of the date in question," she thought. "He may be dead now. His regiment may be no longer in India. He may have exchanged into a home regiment, or sold out his commission altogether. Or it may be that he was no colonel at all, and that his name was not Gray."

She spent the remainder of the morning in her own room alone. In the afternoon she procured a cab, and with Mrs. Margle, her landlady, drove to St. John's Wood, where the house in which her parents had lived was pointed out to her. It was a pretty and picturesque little villa, with a high brick wall separating it from the street. There was evidently a small garden or lawn in front of the house, but the wall hid this from view. A tall, narrow green door was set in the wall, and provided with a brass bell-pull. Upon the gate-posts, in gilt letters, was the name "Brabazon Villa."

"This is the house where I served a year as housekeeper to Mrs. Gray," said Mrs. Margle, as the two, having alighted from the cab, walked slowly past the villa. "That upper room to the right was the drawing-room. The upper room to the left is separated from the draw-

ing-room by a narrow hall, and was Mrs. Gray's boudoir or sitting-room. Adjoining that was her dressing-room, and in the very rear, overlooking the garden, was her bed-room. She used to stand at those drawing-room windows up there and watch for the colonel's coming. Ah, she worshiped him, poor, pretty Mrs. Gray, and she used to fly down the stairs when she saw him coming, and let him in herself at the garden-door, and they'd hug and kiss each other as if they had been separated a year."

Beryl stared at the house with wistful longing. In this little villa, then, her mother had spent this last year of her life. Beryl could almost imagine that she beheld at the upper window the tender, expectant young face that had so long been buried in an unhonored grave; she almost fancied that she could hear the rush of flying feet on the stairs within the house; that she could hear the fluttering of eager hands at the bolts of the garden-door. But her mother's life had ended when her hers began; the feet that had been swift to meet the loved one, the eager hands, the loving heart, were all moldered to dust.

She lingered in a strange fascination about the gate, until Mrs. Margle, discovering that they were attracting attention, persuaded her to return to the cab, and they drove slowly homeward.

On reaching her lodgings, Beryl went to her own room, as usual. She had finished her frugal meal and lighted her student lamp, when her landlady knocked at the door and entered her presence.

"I have come up, Miss Star, to ask you to join our social circle this evening," said Mrs. Margle. "This is not an ordinary lodging-house, you know, and I have quite a number of select lodgers, so to speak. It has

always been my custom to invite them into my drawing-room of an evening, and they bring their newspapers, their books, their sewing and what not, and spend a pleasant evening together. You see I am a lone widow, and I get and give happiness by assembling my lodgers together."

"I dread meeting strangers," said Beryl, shrinkingly.

"But my lodgers are not strangers. They are very nice people too; some of them have been with me for years," urged Mrs. Margle. "I have a piano—a very good one, if it is a little cracked—and some have boxes of dominoes, some have draughts and chessmen and other games. I have an elderly curate and his wife from the fourth pair front—their two sons are sheep-farmers in Australia. There's a medical student, a lady music-teacher who is growing old, two thin maiden ladies, sisters, who are very genteel, and have noble connections, but a very spare income. And I have a new lodger, a very handsome law-student, who only came to-day. I particularly want to make you acquainted with your fellow-lodgers, your life seems so lonely, and they will all be down-stairs this evening. Will you come?"

The invitation was so warmly given that Beryl accepted it. Mrs. Margle bade her come down early, and departed.

Beryl made her toilet anew, half-repenting her concession. She put on a gray silk dress which she had last worn at her pensionnat, and pinned a blue ribbon below the lace frill at her throat. A soft fall of lace half covered her wrists. Her hair had been cut short during her illness, and now clung to her head in tiny rings. It was no longer flame-red in hue, the new, soft growth being darker and of a true red-bronze

tint. Her pale face was delicately fair, with no color save in the lips, and her vivid brown eyes glowed and burned like lamps. She looked her nature, frank, brave, impetuous, quick-tempered, but generous, sweet and truthful to the core.

"Not a sign of mourning about my dress, and not a thought of mourning in my heart, for my dead husband," she thought. "How completely he has passed out of my life! I think now that I should not care if I never knew more about him than I know now. 'Let the dead past bury its dead.'"

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE FOG.

Beryl took up her lamp, and slowly descended the stairs to Mrs. Margle's drawing-room. Her landlady met her at the door, took her lamp from her, and led her into the room, where the lodgers were all gathered about the fire. Then followed introductions to the two maiden sisters of high connections and meager income. The elderly music-mistress, and the medical student who wore spectacles and spoke with a German accent, were made acquainted with Miss Star, and the new lodger, the law student, then emerged from behind his newspaper at the further end of the table, and was formally presented to Miss Star.

One look at his fair, high-bred, handsome face with its indolent air was enough for Beryl. She recognized him as her rescuer of Regent street, Noble Desmond,

and greeted him with a warm smile and at the same time with a perplexed expression, as wondering how he had chanced to become an inmate of the same house with herself. He did not take pains to enlighten her.

The acquaintance between Noble Desmond and Beryl Star grew rapidly and prospered. They met every evening in Mrs. Margle's shabby-genteel drawing-room, in company with their fellow-lodgers.

The month of January was cold, wet and foggy. Beryl was obliged to walk to and from Brunswick Square in all weathers. Her food was insufficient, being necessarily of the cheapest and most meager description.

One morning, during the last week of January, Beryl, attired for her usual walk to Brunswick Square, came down into Mrs. Margle's front basement, and begged a few minutes' interview with her. The landlady was alone, engaged in darning a well-worn table-cloth, a pair of spectacles astride her nose. She begged Beryl to be seated, and the girl complied.

"I can stay but a few moments, Mrs. Margle," she said. "I must not be late at Brunswick Square. I wish to give up my room here as soon as you can find another tenant for it."

Mrs. Margle looked amazed. Beryl stated her sad plight which will be revealed as the narrative goes on.

Noble Desmond entered the drawing-room in the evening.

"Good evening, Mrs. Margle," he said, courteously, sweeping a rapid glance about the room. "I am the first to appear, I see."

"Almost every one in the house has a cold," said Mrs. Margle. "Influenza, I notice, is apt to run through a

house when it once gets started. This is bad weather, sir."

"The fog is very thick," said Desmond. "It is hardly safe for a person to be out in it. There was an accident as I came through Oxford street an hour ago. A cab ran over an old man injuring him severely."

Mrs. Margle looked alarmed.

"Perhaps an accident has happened to Miss Star," she exclaimed. "What if she has been run over! She should have been home two hours ago. I never knew her to be out so late as this. I know something has happened to her."

"Is not Miss Star in yet? Are you very sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. I've been watching for her an hour at this very window. I've been troubled in my mind about her all day, and now perhaps she's beyond all trouble," said Mrs. Margle, nervously. "Or she may be in a 'ospittle dying! She wasn't fit to go out to-day, poor young lady! And I blame myself that I didn't offer her a bit of mutton before she went. If she's dead, I shall feel as if I had had a hand in murdering her, for I knew that she was overworked and starved, and not fit to go out of this house to-day."

Desmond was shocked. His face grew pale.

"Do you think she was not well this morning when she went out?" he asked.

"I know she was not. She came to me and says she: 'Mrs. Margle, can't you give me an attic; for,' says she, 'I can't afford to keep my room no longer,' says she. She gets only twenty shillings a week for her whole time from daylight till dark, as you may say, and she's been paying out more than three-fourths of that for a room, and that's the truth, sir, light and fires thrown in, of course. She's been living on fourpence a day, or

thereabouts, for these many weeks, and working evenings at embroidery that she has not been able to sell. She has a hard struggle with life, Mr. Desmond, and all the friends she has in this world are in this house. How many young ladies of seventeen would be so bright and brave as she always is in her circumstances?"

"I had not dreamed that her life was so hard," said Desmond. "She is always so cheerful!"

"Miss Star is a lady born and bred, with delicate tastes, fond of her books and quiet, and wants a room all to herself. Rough people around her, a foul-smelling house and street, and dirt and swearing, them would all be real troubles to her. She'd rather starve here than live in plenty in St. Giles's. She wants to hire my front attic, and I have decided to let her have it at five shillings per week, though its no place for the likes of her. I'll fix the attic up comfortable, and allow her the use of my drawing-room—poor thing!—and for the rest she'll have to do as other poor gentlewomen do, I suppose. I wish she were here," she added, her uneasiness increasing.

"I will go to look for her. She may be glad of a pilot through this thick fog."

He did not stop to explain that he knew the route by which Beryl made her daily journeyings to and from Brunswick Square, but he had followed the young girl afar off on her return home after her day's duties many times, watching over her safety, himself unseen by her. He hastened now in search of her, unheeding Mrs. Margle. His hat was in the hall. He caught it up, thrust it on his head and hurried out into the street.

The fog seemed to have grown thicker, and the damp, chill air seemed to penetrate to Desmond's bones. He drew up his coat-collar for extra protection, and hurried

into Oxford street, and thence into Tottenham Court Road, proceeding slowly to Bedford Square, which he crossed. He traversed Montague Place and Russell Square, still keeping a vigilant lookout through the gloom, and entered upon Guilford street. He had walked but a few yards upon this street when he came suddenly upon Beryl, who was walking very wearily and slowly. He passed her before becoming perfectly assured of her identity, and then turned with a great sigh of relief and addressed her.

"Is it Miss Star?" he asked, walking beside her. "Mrs. Margle was very anxious about you, and I came to meet you."

"You are very kind, Mr. Desmond," said Beryl, recognizing him by his voice rather than by his face. "I am sorry to have caused Mrs. Margle any anxiety. Mrs. Ryan detained me later than usual to-day to write the invitations to a party which she is to give. I am very tired."

Desmond drew Beryl's arm in his with an air of quiet authority and ownership that thrilled her with a keen and sudden pain.

"Lean upon me," he said gently. "How you tremble! Did you have your dinner at Mrs. Ryan's?"

"Oh, no. I have but just finished my work. It is not in the line of my regular duties, but if I had declined to do it I should have lost my situation."

"But you received pay for this additional work, of course?"

"No. Mrs. Ryan said that I was not to expect extra pay for so slight extra service."

Desmond glowed with an indignation to which he did not give expression. He said, quietly:

"Your life seems very hard, Miss Star. I wonder you keep up courage so well."

"I have much to be thankful for. My life is not without its objects, Mr. Desmond. I am learning to be content."

Yet, even as she spoke, Beryl tottered with a sudden faintness, and clung to Desmond's arm to keep herself from falling. They were in Russell Square now and under a gas-lamp. Desmond saw in the pale glow-worm sort of light that she was deathly pale. His soul yearned over her in a passionate love and tenderness, a deep and ineffable anxiety.

"Do you feel very ill?" he asked.

"It is but a momentary weakness. I have not been well all day. I was weak and dizzy while at work. I shall be all right directly."

They moved on very slowly. Desmond looked sharply through the fog for a cab, but he could see none, nor could he hear one, except far off.

"You work too hard, Beryl," he said, with a tenderness that made her start and tremble. "This life of struggling and toiling is too much for you. How would you like to turn your back upon it all, upon Mrs. Ryan, her children, even your lonely room at Mrs. Margle's, and be the happy queen of a sunny little cottage home, the absolute mistress of a small domain, where you should be loved and honored and cherished?"

"No happiness like that can ever come to me," said Beryl, sorrowfully.

"We have not known each other many weeks," said Desmond, drawing her arm yet closer within his, "yet we know each other well. You know that I am soon to be admitted to the bar. My income from my profession may be very small for years to come, but I have a

fixed income of two hundred pounds a year. I know that you are alone in the world. I love you, Beryl. I have loved you from the first day I saw you. I cannot offer you the wealth which you would grace, but I can offer you a loving heart, the devotion of my whole future life, and the sunny little home I have pictured. Beryl—Beryl, darling, will you be my wife?"

The girl's hand fluttered in his like a prisoned bird. She drew it away, with a low, moaning cry.

"No, no!" she murmured. "I cannot. Oh, Mr. Desmond, you have offered me heaven—and I must refuse it."

He caught her hand in his firm, strong grasp, and held it closely. He made her lean again upon him, while he asked:

"Do you dislike me, Beryl?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Could you not learn to love me?" he whispered.

She was silent. He pressed the question gently, and with an infinite tenderness that would have won to him the heart of an enemy.

"Yes," she said, at last, in a quavering whisper. "Oh, Noble! I love you now."

There was a silence of a few moments between them. They walked on through the thick fog, entering Tottenham Court Road, and moving very slowly. They met very few people, and seemed as much alone upon the London street as if they had been in a wilderness.

"How soon may I claim my little wife?" asked Desmond, at last, in a voice whose happiness smote upon Beryl like a blow.

"Not at all—never!" she answered, in a low, miserable voice. "Oh, Noble! it cannot be. I must go my

own way. You will forget your fancy for me by and by. I shall never marry."

"You do not know me so well as I thought," said Desmond. "You call my love for you a 'fancy.' You think me effeminate, indolent, careless. I seem so, I grant, but surely you know, Beryl, that seeming is not being. I have a strong, passionate nature. My love for you is the one love of my life. You say that you love me. Then I defy the world to part us. I certainly shall not heed your refusal of me, my poor, bewildered little girl. You belong to me by right of your love for me. Remember that always. And by that right I intend to marry you immediately and take care of you."

Beryl uttered a low, choking sob.

"You don't understand me, Noble. I would not burden you with a poor wife, but it is not my poverty that makes me refuse the happiness you offer me. I am in earnest. I cannot marry you."

Desmond was not seriously disturbed by this declaration. She had avowed that she loved him. How long, then, should her quixotic scruples weigh against his pleadings? He held her closer to him as they walked slowly on, still with an air of ownership in her, a quiet authority, a tender care of her, that were as delightful as painful to her.

"At least, Beryl," he said, and she knew that he was smiling, "you will give me a chance to combat your arguments against our marriage. Is there anything about me that you object to?"

"The fault is in myself," said Beryl, desperately. "You have a right to know my reasons, and I will tell you, even though they make you hate me. You are a gentleman, and gentlemen think so much of good birth. And I—I am not well-born."

"Is that all?" asked Desmond. "You are making a mountain out of a molehill, darling. It is you whom I love, not your genealogical tree. That objection won't weigh for an instant."

She had expected that he would draw back from her; but his tenderness had not varied, his support of her had not wavered. She remembered how Dane Conyers had received the story of her birth, and contrasted Desmond's generosity with the terrible wrath of her yonng husband.

"You see," said Desmond, "that you are not to be rid of me so easily, little Beryl. I love you, and I shall not let you go from me. You are alone in the world. You must come to me at once, and brighten my life, and let me take care of you. I am going to speak to Mrs. Margle about our engagement this very night, if you will permit me. To-morrow I shall procure a special license, and I shall take you to church the day after. Here we are at Wells' street. Tell me, darling, that I am to have my own way in this matter."

They turned out of Oxford street while he was speaking.

"Give me a little time to think," said Beryl, trembling. "I will give you an answer to-night."

They concluded the walk in silence. As they passed into the house and the light of the hall-lamp fell full upon the girl, Desmond noticed that she looked strangely wan and pallid, and that her brown eyes had a look in them that was almost wild. They went up the stairs together. He would have spoken further with her, but there was no longer opportunity. Mrs. Margle looked out upon them curiously, and he passed into the drawing-room. Beryl climbed up to her own room.

Her light was burning dimly. The fire glowed in her

grate. She locked her door, and crossing the room, knelt upon her hearth-rug, pale and miserable, her head bowed low upon a chair.

She knelt thus for a long time, shivering now and then as with a chill. She lived over again the events of that evening. The passionate tenderness, the masterful will, the earnest love of Desmond, were all reviewed with an anguish that transcended any she had ever known.

"If I had only known him a few months ago!" she said to herself. "I love him—I love him! 'The sins of the parents shall be visited upon the children,' and I have all that inherited disgrace to bear. I am not fit to be any man's wife. Noble Desmond must know all the truth."

She arose, laid aside her damp outer garments, and brought out her writing materials, and sat down at her table to write out as well and briefly as she could the sad story of her life.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OCTAVIA MAKES AN ENEMY.

Upon the day subsequent to his interview with Mr. Callender in the smoking-room of the Park Lane house, Lord Hawkhurst paid a private visit to his lawyer and informed him that he was about to make his will, and desired drafts to be drawn up enumerating his various estates and properties, and devising certain annuities to faithful servants, as according to a brief schedule which the earl had previously prepared. His lordship did not

mention the name of his destined heir, but asked his legal adviser to come to him upon the evening of the next day with the document ready for signature.

At the appointed time, the lawyer presented himself at Hawkhurst House, and was ushered into the library, where the earl waited to receive him.

"Good evening, Sherwald," said Lord Hawkhurst, coming forward with extended hand. "You are punctual."

The lawyer shook hands wlth his employer, and paused before the fire. The long table, upon which stood an Argand gas-lamp, was littered with papers. The earl had been writing. His safe-door stood open.

"You find me ready for business, Sherwald," said the earl, with a glance at the table. "I have been lookiug over my papers. I am richer than I thought. Property accumulates fast when the income is so large and there is but one to spend it."

"You are all alone, I see, my Lord," said the lawyer.

"Yes. My young kinsman, Rollyn Conyers, is gone out to visit a friend. His wife is in the drawing-room, awaiting certain fashionable calls. Mrs. Conyers is mistress of my house, and she does the honors creditably, I assure you," said the earl, moving toward the table. "I regard her almost as my daughter."

There was a faint rustle in the music-room, which adjoined the library. There was no light in the music-room, but, crouching there in the darkness, close beside the communicating door, was a darker shadow among shadows—the figure of Octavia Conyers.

"I have brought the draft of the will, as you ordered, my Lord," said Sherwald, drawing from his pocket a thick document tied with red tape. "You will find it perfectly correct. The smaller legacies are all mentioned,

with the names of the legatees. The body of the will is also precisely as you ordered. It only remains to write in the name of your destined heir, and to append your own signature, with those of the witnesses."

"Very good," said the earl. "Be seated, Sherwald. Now read me the will."

Lord Hawkhurst flung himself into a chair, and his white, large hand caressed his shaggy red beard, and his eyes glowered under his overhanging brows, as he bent his gaze upon his solicitor.

Mr. Sherwald took up the will and read it slowly, repeating sentences here and there, as directed by his patron. Octavia's eyes glowed in her dark covert as she listened to the enumeration of estates and valuable belongings.

"I have not made mention of my young kinsman, Noble Desmond," said the earl, thoughtfully. "He is a noble fellow, but pig-headed, you know; wants his own way, and is a man to get it. He is an effeminate sort of fellow in seeming, but he's got the Desmond blood. He has a hand of iron under his velvet glove. He is sure to make his mark, and will have plenty of money of his own some day, for he has brains to earn it. He offended me lately while at Hawks' Cliff, and I parted from him in anger, yet he compels my respect, and I'd like to leave him a thousand a year. He's a mere beggar now."

"He is not to be your heir, then, my Lord?"

"No. Rollyn Conyers is to inherit the most of my property. He has sowed his wild oats. So much the better. His marriage will steady him," said the earl. "Give me the papers, Sherwald. We will make the provision for Desmond, and I will then sign the document in the presence of witnesses."

The addition to the will was made. Lord Hawkhurst read the document over very slowly, weighing every sentence with the most scrupulous care. More than an hour thus passed, yet all this while Octavia Conyers scarcely stirred in her shadowy covert, and hushed her very breathing that she might not lose a word uttered in the library. At last the reading was finished, the document was found to be satisfactory to the earl, and his lordship rung his bell and commanded the presence of his butler, house-steward and housekeeper.

In the presence of these old family servants, the earl wrote and avowed his signature, and the three appended their names as witnesses, and were dismissed.

"That's over!" said Lord Hawkhurst, with a sigh, as he found himself alone with his solicitor. "I wish I might have had a son or a daughter to come after me, Sherwald, but such happiness was not for me. Take the will away with you, Sherwald. Keep it in your office in some private drawer. It may be years before it will be called for."

"It is not likely to be called for in my time, my Lord," said the lawyer, cheerfully.

There was some further conversation between the two, and Mr. Sherwald finally took his leave.

Lord Hawkhurst sat down at his table and busied himself with his private papers. Octavia Conyers stole softly from her concealment, crossed the floor of the music-room noiselessly, and opened the door leading into the hall. She peered out cautiously to ascertain if the coast were clear for her retreat.

And as she did so, her gaze encountered that of the lawyer, whom she believed to have left the house. Mr. Sherwald had indeed departed from the house, but remembering some point of business he had omitted

to discuss with Lord Hawkhurst, had immediately returned. He was approaching the door of the library when he beheld the door of the music-room move softly ajar, and had seen Mrs. Conyers protrude her head after a peering, cautious fashion.

Her paling face at sight of him, her frightened eyes, her look of consternation and terror, all betrayed her.

The lawyer was a quiet sort of man, averse to scenes, despite his profession; but he came swiftly along the marble-floored corridor to the very door of the music-room. Octavia stood there trembling, her presence of mind utterly lacking. He looked beyond her into the room behind her, and saw that it was dark. Then his gaze returned to her, and she shrank a little before the keen scorn in his eyes. She was dressed in some gauzy tissue of a golden hue, and wore topaz ornaments in her ears, and on her bared throat. Her hair was dressed high in the most fashionable manner, and her usual short fringe of black hair, finely crimped, hung over her forehead, after the English nursery style. Her dress declared her social position. It was Mr. Sherwald's principle never to be astonished at anything that might happen; but he certainly violated that principle now.

"I have the honor of addressing Mrs. Conyers, have I not?" he asked politely, bowing.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Conyers," said Octavia, struggling to regain her self-possession. "I just came into the music-room to look for a piece of music, but the lights are out and I can't find it. Who are you, sir?"

Mr. Sherwald smiled at the flimsiness of her excuse. The manner in which she had peered out at the door was sufficient proof of her guilt. There was still a look of terror in her eyes, and her face was curiously pale

and anxious, despite her efforts to appear calm and unconcerned.

"I am Mr. Sherwald, Lord Hawkhurst's solicitor, madam," he said, respectfully, yet with a look that assured her that he did not believe in her pretexts, but that he knew her, partially at least, in her true character. "Pardon me for my seeming intrusiveness. Again I beg your pardon. Good evening."

With a low bow, he returned to the entrance of the library, passed it, descended the stairs, and again quitted the house.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LETTER AND ITS ANSWER.

It was a task, indeed, that upon which Beryl had entered. She began again and again her fateful letter to Noble Desmond, but flung page after page upon the fire.

After considerable effort, she produced the following letter:

"NOBLE DESMOND, ESQ.—*Dear Sir:* I have promised to give you an answer this evening to the question you asked me only an hour or two ago. Had I answered it in the negative at the time, I should have spared you and myself much pain, but now that I have confessed to you that I love you I can only tell you the whole miserable truth. I do love you as I never loved any one

before; I love you with all my heart and soul; I shall love you till I die.

"But I can never be your wife—never! I can never be more to you than I am now, and after you shall have read this letter, I know I must be infinitely less. I have not intended to deceive you, nor any one. I had not dreamed that any one would ever feel a special interest in me. Yet none the less you will regard me as an impostor when you know all. I shrink from the telling, yet hasten to plunge into my story before I lose my courage.

"I am not well-born. My cheeks burn while I write these words, which I could never say to your face. My mother was the daughter of a gentleman-farmer, of a good old yeoman family. She was innocent and pure—oh, I know she was! Not all her brother's curses upon her memory, not the fact that her father died on her account broken-hearted, and not even that she lies in an unhonored grave under a stone bearing her maiden name, can make me lose faith in my poor young mother, whose face I never saw—who died in giving me birth. She believed herself an honest wife—that I know from my own heart. God pity him who was my father!

"I was brought up in a boarding-school at Vevay. My life was lonely and desolate. My physical wants were all cared for, but I was never loved and caressed. Think of it. No home but a crowded school, no mother, no one to take an especial interest in me, no love except school-girl affection. When, last June, I had a lover, can you wonder that I fancied I loved him, and that I consented to marry him? But it was not love I had for him. I was flattered, pleased, but my heart was not touched. Had I loved him I think I should have died long before this.

"I am not Miss Star. I am a widow. As I do not know my name by right of birth, so I do not know my husband's name. I think by some strange fatality that my life must resemble my mother's. My husband is dead. I have stood by his grave—a grave not made with hands—in a crevice of the distant Alps, and talked with his servant who witnessed his death, and with the guides who would not venture to rescue his mangled body. I have heard it said that, as he did not marry me under his true name, I was no wife. I have heard idle tongues say that he had a wife before he saw me, but I do not believe this. He really loved me for a while, but he discovered that I was base-born and poor, and had he not died he would have abandoned me or procured a divorce from me, I am very sure.

"I enclose you a notice of his death, which I cut out of a Geneva paper. I have been not yet four months a widow.

"I shall go away to-morrow to cheaper lodgings. We need never meet again, and it would be better so. Spare me the pain of seeing you. Some are born to suffer. I am one of those. Believe me, I am grateful to you for all your kindness to me. Some day you will love and marry a noble lady who will do you honor, but from this hour must drop out of your life and heart the nameless girl who calls herself

BERYL STAR."

This letter did not satisfy Beryl; it seemed so feeble, when her mind and heart were wrought up to such intensity of feeling, but she could not re-write it. She brought out from her trunk the Geneva newspaper announcing the death of Dane Conyers as that of "Vane

Conroy," cut out the notice and inclosed it in the letter, which she then enveloped, sealed and addressed.

With the letter in her hand, she stole out upon the landing, down a flight of stairs to the third-floor, and to the door of Desmond's sitting-room. She thrust the letter under the door, and flitted back up-stairs to her own room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONYERS FOLLOWS OCTAVIA'S EXAMPLE.

Greatly perturbed at having been discovered eavesdropping, Octavia Conyers entered her boudoir. Resting one arm upon the mantel-piece, she drooped her head upon it with a long, troubled sigh.

"You are very melodramatic. Are you practicing for the stage?" inquired a voice which she recognized as that of her uncle, in a tone of pleasant mockery.

Octavia looked up quickly. Mr. Callender was sitting in a large easy-chair just out of the circle of light, and regarding her with a look of quiet intentness.

"You here?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes, I am here. You did not expect to find me in your room, perhaps? The porter told me you were not at home, but I ventured to doubt his word, and pushed on to the drawing-room. Not finding you there, I came on to your private apartments, and concluded to wait here for you. Is Conyers gone out?"

"Yes. He has gone to his club: at least, he said he was going there. I haven't seen him since dinner."

"I came upon business."

There was a brief silence, Octavia feeling reluctant to question him further.

In their preoccupation of mind, neither Octavia nor Mr. Callender heard or heeded the sound of light footsteps on the stair and along the corridor, nor the opening of the door of Octavia's dressing-room, which adjoined the boudoir. Dane Conyers had gone out after dinner, but had returned upon some errand of his own, which had no reference to his wife. On entering the house, however, he had learned from the hall-porter that Mr. Callender was gone up-stairs, and he had looked into the drawing-room, finding it unoccupied.

He knew then that his wife's uncle was in Octavia's private apartments. He leaped to the conclusion that the interview between uncle and niece must, therefore, necessarily be upon private affairs. He remembered the letter which Octavia had crumpled up upon a previous occasion, when he had come upon the two together in his wife's boudoir, and which Octavia had given back into the keeping of Mr. Callender. Conyers had been full of vague suspicions then, believing that his wife and her uncle were conspiring against his interests. Now his dark cheeks flushed with an angry glow, and he experienced no more scruples against eavesdropping than had Octavia at an earlier hour of the same evening. Exquisitely selfish, and not troubled with a nice sense of honor, he crept up the stair, crossed the corridor, and slipped into Octavia's dressing-room. He had not thought of the maid until he entered the room, but the French woman was gone below. He noiselessly turned the key in the lock, and glided through the circle of

light thrown out by the fire, to the shadows that lurked about the door which communicated with the boudoir.

At one side of this door, upon a tall black marble pedestal, stood an exquisite life-size marble statue of an Eastern dancing-girl. The figure was poised as if in the act of dancing. The bare arms were upraised above the head, and the hands held some musical instrument resembling the tambourine. To Dane Conyers, at this moment, this statue represented a desirable screen for his person. He passed behind it, and stood, himself as moveless as a statue, close to the door leading into the boudoir, and bending his head, he listened to the conversation between his wife and her uncle.

"I am sick of that word 'business,'" said Octavia, petulantly. "My nerves are completely upset this evening. I have had a serious fright, and I am trembling yet."

"Ah! Has Lord Hawkhurst made his will yet? He promised to do so yesterday."

"His will is made," replied Octavia. "The lawyer came this evening. I—I happened to be in the music-room when the lawyer was shown in the library, and I heard each of them read the will aloud. I also saw Lord Hawkhurst sign the will in the presence of the housekeeper, butler and steward."

"You are a deuced clever woman, Octavia," said Mr. Callender, admiringly. "Were the terms satisfactory?"

"Very. He devised legacies to various servants, and an annuity of a thousand pounds a year to that stiff-necked Noble Desmond. The entire property, with these trifling exceptions, is bequeathed to Rollyn Conyers."

"And you have allowed anything to annoy you after learning that you are to be in truth the mistress of all

the earl's estates?" cried Callender. "Women are puzzles. I should think you would be wild with delight. Here are all our schemes prospering. Conyers is to be the earl's heir, and your future is secured beyond all possibillty of trouble or annoyance."

"Yes, if the earl could die to-night!" said Octavia, gloomily. "I wish he would die to-night!"

"You fear that he will not believe your protestations a month or two hence—"

"I fear that to-morrow morning he will tear up his will like so much waste paper," interrupted Octavia, with sullen vehemence, her cheeks glowing redly. She proceeded to tell the story of her discovery by Sherwald. She concluded with:

"I know that Sherwald intends to see the earl in the morning and tell that he found me eavesdropping. The earl hates a dishonorable action as he hates poison. He will send me away, he will destroy his will, and perhaps make Desmond his heir. I say again, I wish he would die to-night!"

"I hope he will not," said Mr. Callender, quietly, "else this shrewd lawyer might accuse you of killing him. Your alarm is unnecessary, Octavia. The lawyer did not see the earl to-night. Therein lay his mistake. You must see his lordship before you sleep. You can go to the library, you know, if he should not come to the drawing-room. A woman of your cleverness need not be told how to conduct a matter like this. A pretty affectation of fright or grief, a few tears will set all right. You have only to say that you went to the music-room for a sheet of music, but there being no light you turned to go out and found yourself confronted by this lawyer, and you were too frightened at his sudden and unexpected appearance to excuse your-

self properly under his suspicious questionings. That explanation—if I know the chivalrous earl—will make him angry against the lawyer instead of against you."

Octavia's face began to brighten.

"I can manage it," she said, "provided Hawkhurst doesn't inquire why there was no light in the music-room. The gas was lighted in there as usual, but I turned it off before the lawyer came."

"Hawkhurst won't think to ask that. If he should, you can profess ignorance, and he will think one of the servants did it under the impression that you were gone out. Don't suggest that idea yourself. Best to deal in generalities. That trouble is easily disposed of. I wish that all our anxieties were as easily to be set at rest. I've had another letter from Canada!"

"Another letter? Why he seems to have a mania for writing. This makes the fourth letter you have received from him."

"Yes. I have taken no notice of the other letters, but I cannot pass this one over in silence. He is still ill and will not start for England until May, but he wants me to send him two hundred pounds—not in his own name, he being ill and not able to go for it—but to an address which he gives. The address is that of the man, I think, in whose house he is, and of whom he speaks as a good Samaritan. This good Samaritan, it appears, owes a hundred pounds upon his farm, and our Don Quixote proposes to pay off the debt and stock the farm as a reward for the man's kindness to him."

"I wish the 'good Samaritan' had let him die," said Octavia. "Oh, if he had only died, Uncle Griff.! I don't see what business he had to reveal himself after being silent so long. The secret wears upon me. What if Lord Hawkhurst or Rollyn were to suspect the truth

—that I am not the owner of Cragthorpe—that the true owner, who was supposed to be dead, is my uncle Windsor, and that he is alive and coming home in May !"

Dane Conyers turned pale as these words reached his ears. For a moment he was strangely dizzy, darkness obscured his vision, and there was an odd rushing sound in his ears. He gasped for breath. He had thought that he had cleverly entrapped her—he now began to think that she had entrapped him, and a fierce consuming anger flamed up in his soul.

"Neither Lord Hawkhurst nor Conyers must ever suspect that you have known of your uncle Windsor's existence since before you first met Conyers," said Mr. Callender. "I shall have to own to receiving Windsor's letters, but I shall affirm that I never told you of their contents. You must seem to Hawkhurst and Conyers an innocent, truthful woman, incapable of doing wrong. To let them know that you deliberately set to work to entrap Conyers, that you led him on to that hasty marriage to avoid the dangers delay might bring, would be to ruin yourself."

"Shall you send my uncle the money he demands ?"

"Of course. Is not Cragthorpe his ? Is not the princely income you are spending his ? I shall send the money promptly, acknowledge the receipt of all his letters, tell him that I have not yet informed you of his continued existence, and that I purpose deferring the announcement until his actual arrival in England. I shall tell him of your marriage to the future Earl of Hawkhurst, and shall assure him that we shall be glad to welcome him home again. Do you wish to see his letter ? I have it here."

"No, no. I have no wish to see it."

By this time Dane Conyers was master of himself.

He held in his anger with a firm hand as one holds in hounds in a leash. His face grew set and stern in its expression. He stepped forth noiselessly from his concealment, turned the knob of the door in a silent swiftness, and stalked into the boudoir.

He paused just within the threshold, and looked at Octavia and Mr. Callender with a cold. sneering smile on his lips, and a keen, mocking light in his hard eyes.

Octavia uttered a stifled shriek. Her uncle started, changed color, but maintained an outward composure.

"You are home early, my dear fellow," said Mr. Callender, endeavoring to speak easily. "You keep country hours."

"Don't trouble yourself about me, my good sir," returned Conyers, insolently. "I believe these are my apartments, and I have a right to return to them whenever I please. It pleased me to return to them some time since—in very good time, too, since I have been a listener to nearly your entire conversation."

"You have heard everything? Then you know our innocent little secret, and there's no need of explanations, Conyers," said Mr. Callender, coolly. "You'll hardly venture to blazon the story to the world, or even to tell Lord Hawkhurst. So far as my limited views permit me to see into the case from your standpoint, I can't see what you can do about it anyhow!"

"Your interests and mine are identical, Rollyn," said Octavia, beginning to recover her assurance. "If you expose me to Lord Hawkhurst, he will revenge himself upon you. A man is responsible for his wife's shortcomings. To declare to him that I am an impostor and no heiress, that he is to be balked in his design of uniting Cragthorpe to Hawks' Cliff, that I am not the truthful woman he esteems me, will be to cut yourself off

from all possibility of becoming his heir. All our hope now is in inheriting his money."

"You argue your case well," said Conyers, with a sneer. "I have been cheated into this marriage—regularly entrapped by a pair of designing adventurers—I, who could, as Lord Hawkhurst's heir, have made one of the best matches of the season! You have played your cards well, Callender; you have foisted your niece off upon me very cleverly. I admire the art with which you both have conducted the affair from the beginning. But Octavia is my acknowledged wife, and I must make the best of the matter. She's well-born, at any rate. Lord Hawkhurst made it a condition with me that I should secure her as my wife, and I hope he'll be pleased with the result of his maneuverings;" and Conyers smiled sardonically. "However, as he wanted me to marry her, and as I obeyed him, and as her uncle's return is not her fault, he can't go back on me."

"Certainly not," said Callender, quickly. "He's a testy, quick-tempered, blunderbuss sort of a man, ugly as a tiger when he's crossed, but as generous as the sun. He has a great deal of chivalry, believes in women, thinks them all angels, you know, and he's not going to be hard upon his old friend Windsor's daughter because she has lost her fortune. He'll come nobly to the front and bestow upon you both a handsome income, and you will live with him hereafter. But the truth must not be revealed to him until Windsor comes. The interim you can employ in strengthening your hold upon him, and making yourselves indispensable to him."

Conyers did not choose yet to soften his manner toward Octavia or her uncle. He remained aloof, in the attitude of one who is injured, but he was disposed to make the best of these untoward circumstances.

There was but one course he could adopt with profit to himself, and that was to forget what he had just learned, and pursue the even tenor of his way as though nothing had occurred. But he must strive with double zeal to secure the Hawkhurst property.

"It the earl should take umbrage, and destroy the will he has just made," said Octavia, disconsolately, "Rollyn and I would make a fine earl and countess. How should we live on a thousand a year? Somewhere on the Continent, I suppose, in semi-genteel luxury and wholly genteel poverty, with *vin ordinaire* instead of Johannisberger and Veuve Clicquot, with velveteen gowns instead of velvet, with a pony-chaise instead of carriages and horses in plenty. Lord Hawkhurst has got his will all made, and just to suit us. I wish he could die before my uncle Windsor returns from Canada."

She looked boldly at her two companions, with an angry defiance of fate. Mr. Callender's eyes shot a quick answering gleam, and fixed themselves in a keen gaze upon Conyers, who looked from one pair of eyes to the other pair, bewildered, yet with a singular shrinking comprehension of their meaning. For a moment the three pairs of eyes spoke to each other plainer than words could speak, each gathering courage from the others.

"Octavia," said Mr. Callender, very quietly, "go down, my dear, to the library and explain to Lord Hawkhurst the circumstances of your meeting with Sherwald. While you are gone, I will explain to Conyers how it happened that your uncle Windsor was supposed to be dead, and how he happens to survive."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WHITE MESSENGER.

Desmond awaited Beryl's appearance in the drawing-room until ten o'clock. Some of the lodgers dropped in, after their usual custom, and he did not enlighten his landlady in regard to his engagement with Beryl. At last, despairing of Beryl's appearance that evening, and greatly troubled lest she should be ill or suffering, Desmond took up his lamp and went up to his room.

"She may have taken a chill," he thought, anxiously. "She is alone up there, with no one to take care of her if she should be ill. This must all be changed. Poor, half-starved, lonely and sorrowful, yet sunny of heart and face, I shall not suffer her to live on in this manner. It is time she were taken care of."

He opened his door and passed into his sitting-room.

As he entered, his foot struck against Beryl's letter. He picked it up, locked the door, and sat down in his easy-chair with a pleased and happy smile. He knew from whom the letter had come, and kissed the address with a reverent, passionate tenderness, before he broke the seal.

"She has given me my answer to-night, as she promised," he thought. "The letter looks stained with tears."

The newspaper scrap fell out. He read it first, keeping the precious letter to be dwelt upon and studied

later. But the printed item seemed to have no connection with Beryl, and he laid it aside, wondering.

Then he read the letter—not once, but again and again. He studied the newspaper scrap in the light thus thrown upon it. It is needless to say that Beryl's revelation was very bitter to him. He could have sworn from her well-bred air, and gentle, unfailing courtesy, her half-haughty carriage, her proud patrician beauty, her regard for others' feelings, even those of the meanest servant, that she was of gentle birth, the child of long generations of culture and education. If her cheeks had burned in writing her letter, his burned in reading it, but burned in admiration of her bravery, her truthfulness, her simple honesty. How easily she might have kept all this from him if she had wished! But it was the latter part of the letter that hurt him most deeply. A widow at the age of seventeen—a widow when he had believed her a maiden—the widow of a man whose real name she said she did not know!

For an hour Desmond gave himself up to his thoughts, which we will not attempt to detail. It is enough to say that Beryl's letter seemed to him full of bitterest pathos, and that he had not loved her half so well before. His soul overflowed with a passionate tenderness for her. He was a proud man, but his pride was an honorable and elevating principle, not a degrading sentiment. Give her up!—never! What mattered her origin? What mattered it that she had been the wife of a scoundrel? He pitied and loved her all the more for what she had suffered.

He heard somewhere toward midnight a troubled step pacing softly to and fro. His face was transfigured as he hearkened.

"My poor little darling!" he whispered to himself.

"Is it too late to send her a message? I cannot let her think that I have let her go out of my life as she has bid me—she must not think so even till morning."

He took up the letter she had written him and laid it on the fire. Then he went to his desk and wrote these lines in a firm hand that was an index to his firm, strong, masterful nature:

"My Poor Little Beryl: I have read your letter and burned it. So let your past perish from your mind. We will never allude to it hereafter; you shall begin a new life with me, my darling, and I will make your life all sunshine, if God will permit me; and if shadows do obscure our path, we shall yet tread it together. My darling, I shall not let you go from me! Did you think that I could love you less because you had suffered? My own Beryl, you do not know me. I shall procure a special license to-morrow for our marriage, and on the day after to-morrow I shall take your life into my keeping.

Noble Desmond."

As he folded this note, he saw the newspaper item still lying on the table. He took up the scrap and burned that also, watching it flame up and burn to a blue crisp ghost of what it had been, and then, his letter in hand, he stole softly up the stair to Beryl's door. He thrust his letter beneath it, as she had done a little before with her letter at his door, and tapped once very lightly on the panel to call her attention, and then he returned to his own room.

He heard her pause in her walk; he heard her quick spring forward as she caught sight of the white messenger of joy upon her floor. No answer came from her that night. He did not go to bed, and during hour

after hour, as he sat by his fire wakeful and deeply thoughtful, he could hear her light movements now and then as she crossed her room, or went to her window, or stirred her fire.

"She is sleepless, too!" he thought, yearningly. "She cannot refuse me again. Will the morning never come!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT ST. JUST'S.

Night wore away at last, and morning dawned, a morning gray with fog and chill and dampness. Noble Desmond made his toilet for the day and listened to every sound in the corridor, to every step on the stair, with a hope of receiving some further message from Beryl. But none come. The housemaid scrubbed the doorsteps and performed her usual duties throughout the house, bringing Desmond's breakfast to him at eight o'clock. But he could not eat and did not sit down to his table.

He heard a light step on the stair. Then a little note came softly under his door. The step continued to descend the lower stairs. Desmond caught up his letter hastily, and found that it contained only these words:

"I cannot take advantage of your generosity. Spare us both the pain of meeting again."

Desmond crushed the letter into his pocket, put on his hat and hurried out of the house.

As he had comprehended, Beryl was already on her way to Brunswick Square. He overtook her at Bedford Square ; he stepped forward very quietly and drew her arm within his. Beryl looked up with a low cry, and would have drawn away from him, but he held her hand in a firm clasp that did not heed her struggles. She had a small parcel in her hand containing the roll that was to serve as her luncheon. Desmond took the parcel from her gently and thrust it into his outer-coat pocket. He was gentle and tender as the most humble lover, but he had also an air of quiet authority, a masterful protectiveness, as if she belonged to him utterly, that thrilled the girl's lonely heart anew with joy and pain.

"Are you on your way to Brunswick Square?" he asked.

Beryl replied in the affirmative.

"I shall go with you to Mrs. Ryan's door," said Desmond, "and will wait for you outside. Your stay need be but brief. All that is necessary to say to the lady is that you must resign your situation. I shall send you back to Wells street in a cab and shall come to you as soon as I have transacted a little business at Doctors' Commons. Is this satisfactory to you, my darling?"

The square was very silent, the morning thick with fog. He bent his head to look into her face. She was very pale and wan, with big brown eyes set in purple circles. Her short rings of red-brown hair shaded a troubled brow.

"Did you find my note this morning?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "Did you think, Beryl, that I should let your girlish scruples come between us now? You are free to marry me ; you love me. I love you ; I am free to marry you ; I can give you a comfortable

home. What more can be said? We will bury this dead past out of our memory. I will teach you to forget that men are sometimes base and cruel."

"But you are a gentleman, Noble. I am not a fit wife for you."

"Permit me to be the judge of that," said Desmond. "You are a lady, Beryl, despite any cloud on your origin and despite your recent misfortunes, and any man of however high rank would be honored by marriage with you. I accept all the responsibility; you are not even to think in the matter. You are to become my wife to-morrow."

Beryl ceased her protestations. It was pleasant to submit to this stronger will, to be led in the way of happiness, even against her convictions of what was due Desmond.

"*He* has been dead some four or five months," she said, in a low voice. "Our marriage was never published in England, although we were married at Geneva and lived for a month near Ouchy on Lake Leman. I have never been called by his name, never worn mourning for him, and never informed any one in England, except my mother's brother, of my marriage."

"You are thinking that this marriage seems to come very soon after the other?" said Desmond, comprehending her thoughts. "True, Beryl; but you are not known to be a widow, and have no need to wait a year out of respect to a man who proved himself a villain. Trust me, darling. Let me have my own way about our marriage."

Beryl yielded her will to that of her lover, although even as she did so a strange presentiment of evil clouded her spirit. She did not speak of this presentiment, attributing it, perhaps, to physical weakness, but she

was very silent throughout the remainder of the walk to Brunswick Square.

Desmond left her at Mrs. Ryan's door and went in search of a cab. He returned in the vehicle, but was obliged to wait a full half-hour before Beryl came down the steps, her cheeks flushed, and an indignant red sparkle glowing in her eyes.

Desmond alighted at first sight of her. He helped her into the vehicle, and stood by the open door, his hat in his hand.

"I could hardly get away," said the girl, with a half laugh. "Mrs. Ryan was not willing to lose me, after all She reproached me for my ingratitude in wishing to leave her, read me a long lecture upon my improvidence in giving up my situation, and kept back the sovereign she owes me, as I am leaving her without due notice. Please tell the man to drive to Oxford street. I will tell him when to stop."

Desmond complied with the request, and the lovers parted, he to go cityward, and she going to Oxford street.

When she left Mrs. Margle's that morning, Beryl had determined to seek cheaper lodgings before returning that night. She had used a large portion of the money that remained to her from the fund acquired in Geneva by the sale of her trinkets, and was in need of shoes and gloves. She had put into her pocket two or three pieces of her mother's jewelry, including a diamond brooch, with the intention of selling them. Her determination to so dispose of them was still unchanged. She had her fair share of womanly pride. Her toes were peeping from her boots, although the white stockings beneath had been carefully inked that they might not show. Her gloves had been darned and mended

until they were past mending. Her hat had belonged to her school wardrobe, and after six months' wear in rain and sun, despite repeated renewals of the ribbon trimming, was very shabby, indeed. It will be remembered that she had not retained any portion of the wardrobe Conyers had bought for her.

"I want to look my best to-morrow," she thought. "I want to look beautiful to Noble. I will not go to him with these shabby school-garments bought for me by my uncle's money. I will procure a proper outfit that he may not be ashamed of me. I must sell my mother's jewels, but the clothes I shall buy will seem a gift from her. And I shall still have her necklace and ruby locket."

She stopped the cab at a jeweler's shop, and alighted. The brooch she offered for sale was worth above a hundred pounds. She obtained sixty pounds for it, the jeweler informing her that he was not in the habit of buying second-hand ornaments, but would make an exception to this rule for her benefit.

With this money in hand Beryl felt rich. She drove to an outfitter's and purchased two sets of very fine undergarments; to a milliner's, and bought a dainty round hat of black, trimmed with blue ostrich feathers and ribbon to match, the brim faced with pale- blue silk. Then she proceeded to a first-class dry-goods establishment and purchased a wedding-dress and a travelling-costume.

The former was a dainty gray silk, with a gray velvet jacket. The latter was of navy-blue serge. Gray and navy-blue gloves, and a pair of fine walking-boots completed her list of purchases, the whole having cost only some seventeen pounds. She returned to Wells street

with her new acquisitions, and the housemaid carried them up-stairs for her.

Mrs. Margle made haste to call upon her lodger. She found Beryl trying on her new silk gown, and the good woman stood amazed. The ruffled skirt, the well-fitting basque, which had been adapted to the form of its present owner, the soft frills of tulle at the throat and in the slashed sleeves, were stared at by the landlady with a countenance that grew with every instant most severe.

"Excuse me, miss," she said, frigidly, "as it is so unusual for you to come home so early in the day, I made bold to come up to see if you were ill. Pardon my intrusion."

"It is no intrusion," said Beryl, pleasantly. "Please sit down, Mrs. Margle. I am only trying on a new dress and am not at all ill."

Beryl proceeded to explain the situation. She concluded with :

"Mr. Desmond spoke of spending a week at Brighton. We have not had time to form our plans."

"You may be sure that Mr. Desmond has laid out his plans, even if they should be subject to your approval," said Mrs. Margle. "How I have been mistaken in him ! I took him, at first, to be a sort of dainty gentleman with no grip in him, so to speak, but he's got a will like the first Napoleon's. I shouldn't be surprised to see him lord chancellor some day. He is to be admitted to the bar very soon, and has now a clear income of two hundred pounds a year. You'll be doing well in your marriage, miss, and I shall wish you joy. When is the bans to be put up ?"

"There are to be no bans published," said Beryl. "Mr. Desmond seemed anxious to be married at once, and will not wait three weeks, as would be necessary if

he published the bans. We live in the same parish, and he can easily procure a special license. He knows all about the law, and how and what to do. We are to be married to-morrow morning."

"So soon? That is prompt. Are you to be married in church, or in a registrar's office?"

"I do not yet know. Mr. Desmond will tell me to-night. But I wish to ask you to attend our marriage, Mrs. Margle. Mr. Desmond will ask you also. We have no friends or relatives to invite—"

"Mr. Desmond has relatives, although they probably wouldn't approve his marriage," said Mrs. Margle. "He's got a distant cousin who is a lord, so I've been told, though Mr. Desmond never said anything about noble relatives. This lord is a great politician, our curate says, and is as rich as Crœsus. His name is Lord Hawkhurst, and he's an earl. I should have thought, miss, that you would have worn white to be married in. White is so appropriate to a young bride. Gray is more suitable to a widow marrying again."

"Yes," said Beryl, the color dying out of her face, "but gray is suitable for me."

Mrs. Margle took her leave, intent upon her own wardrobe.

A little later the housemaid came up with a sealed envelope, in which was an address-card, bearing these words in pencil:

"My darling, come down to me in the drawing-room."

Beryl obeyed the summons.

She found Desmond alone. Mrs. Margle was in the hall outside, engaged in a vigorous dusting of the hall

table with her apron. Desmond met his betrothed at the door, happy and impatient.

"I have obtained our special license, my darling," he said, shutting the door and putting his arm around her and drawing her toward the hearth. "It authorizes any clergyman or registrar to unite in marriage Noble Desmond, bachelor, and Beryl Conroy, widow. You start at the name. Is it so unfamiliar to you? You know I was obliged to give your true name as nearly as you know it. And all the arrangements are made for our marriage at St. Just's to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock. I have informed Mrs. Margle of the imminent change in our affairs, and she will accompany us to the church. Is there any one you would like to witness our marriage—any friend, however humble?"

"No one. Mrs. Toploft is thousands of miles away. There was an old servant of my uncle who was my mother's nurse—but I don't want her. If you take me, Mr. Desmond, you take one without friends as well as without name, birth or fortune," said Beryl, sighing. "But have you no friends to invite? Mrs. Margle says that you have a noble relative, Lord Hawkhurst, who may be offended at your marriage with me."

"And suppose he were?" said Desmond, with an amused smile. "Lord Hawkhurst troubles himself very little about me, you may be sure, Beryl—as little as I do about him. He does not look upon me now with any favor. But enough of Lord Hawkhurst. Do you know, darling, that we are betrothed and are to be married to-morrow, and you have never even given me a kiss?"

He put his hand under her chin and lifted her face into his full view. It was a shy, happy face, radiant with its bright, rare beauty, and illuminated by a pair

of trustful, loving eyes; a pure and childlike face, as tender and lovely as it was sweet and spirited. The look she gave him was a caress, but the kiss he had to take for himself—she offered none.

Their interview was brief, Mrs. Margle coming in presently. Beryl hurried away up-stairs, but made her appearance as usual that evening in the drawing-room. Her fellow-lodgers were all there. Mrs. Margle had told the story of Beryl's betrothal, and all were full of interest in the young couple and good wishes for them. Before their unaffected kindness and sympathy all Beryl's embarrassment disappeared. The lodgers were all invited to attend the wedding, and all accepted the invitation.

The next morning, at a quarter before eleven o'clock, three livery carriages, well equipped, approached as near as possible in regular line the door of Mrs. Margle's lodging-house. The curate, with Beryl on his arm, came down the steps, and entered the first carriage and drove away. Desmond, the curate's wife and Mrs. Margle occupied the second vehicle. The high-born sisters, in well-worn finery, and the elderly music-mistress, attended by the medical student, took possession of the third. The little procession drove rapidly toward the church in which the marriage ceremony was to be performed.

The ceremony was performed, and she was safely sheltered at last in a good man's love, and at last she had a name rightfully her own.

The young people proceeded to the vestry and signed the marriage-register. Beryl signed her name "Beryl Star Conroy." She hesitated a little at that last name, having been about to write it "Conyers," but she was now fully assured that "Conyers" had been but a per-

version of the true name of the man she had married in Geneva, and had the impression that his real name had been "Conroy." Her name, too, had been given in the marriage-license as "Conroy," so it was necessary to adhere to it.

This little ceremony over, the friends of the young couple crowded around them with good wishes and congratulations.

It had been decided that the newly married pair should proceed to Brighton by the early evening train, leaving London Bridge about dusk. In the meantime, a wedding-breakfast, which had been ordered by Desmond at a noted caterer's in Regent street, would be served at Mrs. Margle's house, and all the lodgers were to partake of it.

Beryl passed out again into the church, clinging to Desmond's arm. He drew her arm again in his and led her down the aisle to the entrance. They passed out together into the street.

At that moment a carriage, with a crest upon its panels, drawn by two high-stepping horses, and attended by a coachman in livery upon the box and two footmen in livery at the back, came slowly along the street, going toward Oxford street. In the carriage were seated a gentleman and lady, both faultlessly attired. The equipages in front of the church, the little throng at the portal, caught the attention of the gentleman and lady. They both looked intently in that direction.

The carriage was that of Lord Hawkhurst. The gentleman occupying it was Rollyn Dane Conyers. The lady was Octavia.

"Look, Rollyn," said Octavia, in a lisping, affected voice. "A marriage, I do declare. And the bridegroom

is Noble Desmond, as I live! But who is the lady? She's not in white, and she's got red hair, actually. Who is she?"

Dane Conyers looked at his deserted young wife, who believed him dead, and grew white as marble.

The bridegroom did not notice the passing carriage, his cabman having addressed him at that moment. He helped his young wife into the vehicle, sprang in himself, gave the order, "Wells street," and they drove slowly on their return to their lodgings.

Desmond put his arm about his wife, with some whispered words of love. She did not reply to him. Her form seemed strangely relaxed. Her head had drooped suddenly to her breast. He lifted it and looked upon her face. She was in a deadly swoon, her face ghastly in its pallor, her eyes half open, and a look of horror frozen into their depths.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OCTAVIA'S SUSPICIONS.

The carriage of Lord Hawkhurst turned into Oxford street and proceeded westward, becoming lost in a throng of vehicles, as the bridal-party of Noble Desmond went eastward. Conyers still sat with a face that looked as if cut from marble, with staring eyes and terror-stricken visage. Octavia regarded him in amazement.

"What is the matter?" she asked sharply. "Have

you taken leave of your senses? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I—I am ill!" gasped Conyers. "A sudden spasm of pain—at my heart. Don't speak to me!"

"If you are ill, we must go home, I suppose," said Octavia, ungraciously. "And I have so much shopping to do in Bond street—I must see the jeweler—can you not go home without me?"

The guilty, miserable man opposite her looked very haggard and worn, with a gray color creeping over his face and a desperate look in his eyes. Guilty as he was, he might almost have been deemed worthy of pity in that moment, when the woman for whom he had sinned so deeply exhibited such heartless disregard of his suffering.

"Let me alone," he said. "The fresh air may do me good."

He leaned back upon his cushions, his face half hidden in the fur collar of his overcoat, his hat drawn over his brows. Octavia bowed right and left with smiling graciousness, to acquaintances in carriages and acquaintances on foot, for her circle of friends was already quiet large—and the carriage turned into New Bond street.

Octavia made her visit to the jeweler's, and while she was thus occupied, Conyers drove to a quiet little place not far distant, and procured a glass of brandy. His nerves strengthened by the quick stimulant, his coolness and courage began to return in some measure, and he hailed a passing hansom cab, and was driven back to the little gray old church.

It was not closed. He went in. The clergyman was gone, but the clerk still lingered, being deep in conversation with the pew-opener. The idlers who had come

in to witness the marriage were all departed. Conyers waited until the clerk had given some final orders to the pew-opener and had turned to depart, and then stepped forward with a courteous bow.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, with an appearance of great respect. "I beg you to permit me to look at your marriage register, only for one moment. And as I cannot offer any recompense to a gentleman like yourself, permit me to show my gratitude by this contribution to your poor-box."

Conyers drew from his pocket five golden sovereigns. The clerk took them up and dropped them into the poor-box. He then invited the yonng man to follow him into the vestry.

The church safe was unlocked by the clerk, and the marriage register brought forth and laid upon the desk. Conyers read the latest entry with blurred eyes and a wildly beating heart :

"Noble Desmond, bachelor,"

and

"Beryl Star Conroy, widow."

A sensation of faintness crept over him. He believed that he was safe.

He muttered the word to himself again and again. "Safe! Safe!" He thanked the clerk politely and went out again into the street, every pulse throbbing.

"Let her dare attack me!" he thought, savagely. "I'll fling the charge of bigamy back in her own teeth! Yet she is innocent. She believes me dead. She thinks my real name Conroy, and has told Desmond so. And I am really guilty of bigamy. They would punish me, but not her. Desmond did not see me, I'll swear to

that. Will she tell him all the truth? Will she set him on my track? And, if she does, will he endeavor to procure a divorce for her from me and marry her again? After all, I am in a ticklish situation. If I had Beryl to deal with I could command success, but Desmond is a lion."

He dismissed his cab and walked out into Oxford street, mingling with the midday throng of passers. Presently his chaotic thoughts took shape again.

"How beautiful Beryl looked when I first beheld her to-day! She looked like an angel. She is the only woman I ever loved, and I love her still. If she had been well-born and rich, I might have been the happiest man in the world. Only four or five months since I was supposed to have died, and she is married to another!" he muttered jealously. "The only woman I ever loved, the woman I still love, is Desmond's wife! What a fatality!"

He could have groaned in his anguish. All his love for Beryl came back to him with renewed strength, now that she was forever beyond his reach.

Angry, jealous, miserable and full of apprehensions, he paused abruptly at the curbstone, intending to signal a cab and return to Hawkhurst House. But before he could do so, the Hawkhurst carriage drew up in front of him, and a footman sprang lightly down and opened the door.

"Oh, you truant!" cried Octavia, in high falsetto tones, shaking her muff at him with an affectation of petty reproof. "Come, dear. Fortunate I saw you on the curb. We will go home now."

Conyers ascended into the carriage and leaned back upon the cushions.

"Home!" said Octavia.

The carriage rolled slowly and luxuriously along the street to the westward.

"Do you feel better?" asked Octavia. "You are looking miserably, Rollyn. Your complexion is actually green, and your eyes have quite a tigerish look in them. I couldn't imagine where you had disappeared to. I had a most delightful time at the jeweler's, and bought a set of rubies that become me immensely."

Octavia then lapsed into a silence which lasted until they reached the house in Park Lane. They alighted and went up to their private rooms, the footman bringing in Mrs. Conyers's multifarious parcels. Octavia went into her boudoir. Conyers would have gone on to his own dressing-room, but she bade him imperiously to come into her room. He obeyed, listlessly.

"Shut the door!" she commanded, looking into her dressing-room. "My maid is not here, thank fortune. Sit down, Rollyn. Do you think you have deceived me to-day?"

Conyers sat down.

"Deceived you?" he repeated. "In what should I attempt to deceive you?"

"You were no more ill than I, in the carriage!" said Octavia, tearing off her hat and gloves and flinging them upon her piano. "But you were frightened nearly to death! Don't deny it. You looked turned to stone when you beheld Noble Desmond and that girl in front of that church. Who was the girl?"

"How do I know?" asked Conyers, sullenly.

"You knew. You have seen her before. I saw the look she gave you. And I know that when you left me in Bond street, you went back to that church. I was on my way back there to assure myself of the fact when I encountered you. Is Desmond married?"

"I suppose so. If you're going to be jealous, Octavia, that will be the only thing necessary to render my life a hell upon earth. Pursue your present course if you wish to become utterly abhorrent to me. As to your cross-questioning, do not practice it upon me!"

Octavia's eyes snapped viciously.

"You have got a secret," she said, "and it is connected with Desmond's wife. I mean to pry it out. I shall find his address and call upon her."

"Do so, if you dare! Octavia, I've borne enough! Pry into my secrets, madam, and I'll go to Lord Hawkhurst and tell him your real character! Better let me alone!"

Arising, Conyers hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER XXX.

LORD HAWKHURST FAVORS OCTAVIA'S PLANS.

The events in the preceding chapter occurred upon the day following the evening in which Lord Hawkhurst affixed his signature to his will, and consequently upon the day following Mr. Sherwald's acquaintance with Octavia in her dishonorable character of eavesdropper.

Octavia had gone down to the library at a late hour upon that evening of her unmasking by the lawyer, had found Lord Hawkhurst still in the library and had told her story with such effect as to convince the earl that she was the most scrupulously honorable, the most sensitive of women. She kindled his anger against Sherwald for having dared to suspect her of such base-

ness as eavesdropping, and after certain artful allusions to her dear father and her dear father's affection for the earl, she returned to her own rooms well satisfied that she had completely forestalled and neutralized any story the solicitor might impart to his noble employer.

On re-entering the boudoir she found Conyers and Mr. Callender in close conversation, and with countenances whose singular expressions gave her some uneasiness, she not being able to fathom them. They broke off their private consultation at her entrance, and her uncle soon after took his leave.

And on the next morning while the stormy interview was occurring between Conyers and Octavia, which ended in the retreat of the former to his own private dressing-room in high anger, Mr. Sherwald arrived at Hawkhurst House, was duly announced, and ushered as usual into the great handsome library.

Lord Hawkhurst sat at a richly carved desk at a little distance from the great bay-window, the dull light of the February day streaming over his shoulders upon the paper before him. As Sherwald entered, he looked up with a frown, which disappeared as he recognized the intruder, and he arose with his never-failing courtesy and greeted his visitor, with a stiffness, however, and a lack of cordiality he had never before displayed to his solicitor.

"I thought I should be sure to find you at home at this hour, my Lord," said Mr. Sherwald. "We neglected to arrange that matter of Mr. Conyers's annuity, or allowance, last evening, and I wish more fully to understand your ideas in regard to it. If you can give me a half-hour or so now, I shall be glad to receive your instructions. Or, if you will appoint a time more convenient to you, I will call again."

"It is as well to understand the matter now," said Lord Hawkhurst, coldly. "I do not purpose settling any annuity upon Conyers in legal fashion—to bind myself absolutely to the payment of any fixed annual sum. Conyers is to be my heir; that is settled. I shall never marry again. My will is made in his favor. I shall treat him as if he were my son—give him a thousand a year out of my own purse. With what he already has of his own, he will thus be independent of his wife's fortune. But as to legal documents and binding myself by legal form to contribute to his support, I do not care to do it. My word is as good as my bond."

Mr. Sherwald had taken a seat near the earl's, who had resumed his. The lawyer was grave and troubled. He hardly knew how to enter upon a statement which he conceived it his duty to make. The earl's countenance did not invite his confidence, but was cold and unusually haughty. To gain time, and to establish, if possible, the usual pleasant relations between himself and patron, Mr. Sherwald brought up a subject to which circumstances had given prominence in his mind during the past few hours.

"By the way, my Lord, we were speaking yesterday of your young kinsman, Desmond, who bears your own family name, and with it many of the lion-like characteristics of your house. You made a provision for him in your will. He seems to be a very noble young fellow, quiet and gentlemanly, with a will as strong and resolute even as your own. I am greatly impressed with him. I think you told me that he has an income of only two hundred pounds a year. Am I mistaken?"

"That is all," said the earl, "although he told me that he had lived on half his income for some years, and has a matter of five hundred pounds clear and in bank."

"He'll need it now," said Mr. Sherwald. "I was in the office of a friend of mine, a rising young barrister, yesterday. While we were in conversation, in came Desmond. I retired into an inner room, from which I could see him, but I did not know who he was. Later my friend told me of Desmond's business with him. It seems that he and Desmond are very good friends, and that he owns a pretty little villa at Fulham, which some godmother left him, and which is now empty. Desmond desires to hire it or lease it for a number of years, and the arrangements are to be completed after Desmond's return from Brighton, whither he goes to-day to remain a week."

The earl arched his shaggy red brows.

"A villa at Fulham!" he ejaculated. "What does Desmond want of a villa at Fulham?"

"He told his friend, who is my friend," said Mr. Sherwald, "that he expected to be married to-day."

"Married? He? The sly dog! He pretended to me at Hawks' Cliff that he had never loved any woman, and I actually believed him!" cried the earl, reddening angrily.

"I am positive that he had never seen this lady when he visited you in October," said Mr. Sherwald. "My friend —his friend also, you remember—told me that they had not been three months acquainted, and that the lady is a widow who has lived all her life out of England, but who is English born. Without doubt they were married this morning."

"Humph?" said the earl. "Well, it's nothing to me. Is she well-born?"

"I don't know. My friend doesn't know either, I think. But she is, doubtless. A man like Desmond would naturally marry a refined and well-born lady."

"I am not sure," said the earl, doubtfully. "He told me once that he'd marry any woman, no matter if she were a cobbler's daughter, if he loved her, and I believe he would. But she has money, probably?"

"I think not. He did not say much about her, but there were no marriage settlements. He insured his life for her benefit yesterday for a sum of five thousand pounds. I rather think she must be poor. What little he said about her was spoken with as much pride as if she were a princess of our own royal family."

"I should like to know more about Desmond's marriage," said the earl. "I was greatly taken with him until he set up his will against mine. He is a man of sterling principle, and commanded my respect. If he could have won Miss Windsor's love and married her, I should have made him my heir in preference to Conyers."

"And Conyers won the heiress," said Sherwald, finding an opening at last for his intended communication. "Do you think Mrs. Conyers very beautiful, my Lord?"

"Well, no, not beautiful after any very lofty type, but she's pretty and showy. She has good blood in her, Sherwald. Her father was the soul of honor."

"It is a pity that he did not transmit his noble qualities to his daughter," said Mr. Sherwald, gravely. "Pardon me, my Lord, but this young lady is not worthy your high regard." He then told his story.

The earl's steel-blue eyes flashed fire.

"Be careful, Sherwald!" he said, haughtily, and with an anger that convulsed all his rough-hewn, massive features. "It is not the part of a gentleman to traduce a lady." Hawkhurst then told his counter-story, concluding with: "You basely and grossly insulted the

mistress of my house—the future Countess of Hawkhurst—the daughter of my dear old friend !"

"But, my Lord, I assure you—"

"I want no assurances," interrupted the earl, roughly. "You may apologize to Mrs. Conyers, but I will not hear another word on the subject, except words of regret for your insulting conduct."

The earl's wrath flamed up like a devastating fire. He actually raved in his madness. Sherwald stood up and bore his anger in calmness. Lord Hawkhurst grew more and more fierce with every instant, his voice ringing through the house in a passionate frenzy, and he finally ended by ordering Sherwald out of his house.

The solicitor bowed, still calmly, and quietly walked out of the room.

As he paused outside to close the door, he saw that a few servants were gathered in groups in the hall, at the head of the area stairs, and were pale and frightened. They had all learned to fear the earl in his tornado-like bursts of passion. Sherwald raised his eyes, and beheld on the upper landing, leaning lightly on the balustrade, Octavia Conyers. Her hard black eyes were gleaming, her face wore a mocking smile. He bowed to her, but in the steely gleam that crossed his visage, and the strange smile on his lips, she might have read a warning. She had made this man her deadly enemy, but just then she only thought of her triumph and his humiliation.

He took up his hat and left the house. As he walked down Park Lane toward Piccadilly, he thought, in his own heart :

"That woman's triumph won't be very long-lived. If it were not that I really respect the earl and like him, I'd never forgive him for this scene of to-day. I hope he'll

discover that woman's real character before harm is done!"

The earl sank back in his chair after the departure of Sherwald. Quick to wrath, fiery of soul, with a wicked temper, his anger was yet quickly spent. He was already regretful for his violence.

"The idiot doubtless meant well," he thought, with pangs of very uncomfortable self-reproach. "I was too hasty. Sherwald's a gentleman, and I treated him like a dog. A friend of thirty years' standing treated with contumely, because he expressed his honest convictions! Of course, he believed what he said, the thick-skulled idiot!"

He drew a long, sobbing sigh, and resting his head on his hand, was very silent for a long time.

There came a knock upon his door, which opened, and with the rustling of silken drapery Octavia Conyers came sweeping in. The earl roused himself wearily and looked toward her. She wore still her carriage-costume of mauve velvet, which swept the floor, and was trimmed profusely with bands of silver-fox fur. Her bodice was cut open in heart-shape and outlined with a band of fur, inside which was an upright frill of yellow old point lace. She wore in her ears, on her neck and upon her arms the rubies she had purchased that morning out of her Cragthorpe income—consequently, out of her uncle's money—and her ostensible object now was to exhibit them to Lord Hawkhurst for his approval and admiration.

"Can you spare me a few moments, my Lord?" she asked sweetly, approaching him. "Do not rise, I beg of you. Let me come in without ceremony, just as if I were your own daughter, you know. I wish I were your daughter, Lord Hawkhurst. The love I should have

given my own papa, if he had lived, I have given to you."

Lord Hawkhurst had arisen, in spite of her protestation. He smiled faintly at her words, and made some remark expressive of his appreciation of her high regard.

"I've been out shopping this morning," continued Octavia, in girlish volubility, "and I bought these rubies. I want your opinion concerning them. Are they not lovely? I gave a thousand pounds for them. Should you think them worth the money?"

She drew herself up to her utmost height, that Lord Hawkhurst might see the jewels more distinctly. She had deemed it advisable to secure the trinkets at the expense of the true owner of Cragthorpe, confident that he would never compel her to yield them up after she should declare to him that she had not known that he still lived.

"They are very fine," said the earl, rather indifferently. "They are becoming to you, Octavia."

"Yes," she answered, moving her head so that the red jewels swung to and fro like living coals. "Rubies always become brunettes. Rollyn has told me that you have superb family jewels, rubies and diamonds, of immense value and great beauty. Will you show them to me some day, dear Lord Hawkhurst? I adore jewels."

"They are locked up in bank," said the earl. "They have not been worn since my wife, who was Lady Portia Marly, wore them. Possibly some day I may withdraw them from the bank and have them reset; but not this season, I think."

"I wish I might wear them," said Octavia, with pretended impulsiveness. "Oh, what have I said? What must you think of me? But it seems so hard that those priceless gems should be locked up in a bank-vault

instead of flashing their beauty in the gaslight, and becoming the envy of every fashionable woman in town. I'm such a child, my Lord, I say whatever I think. You must treat me as if I were really your daughter, and scold me when I deserve it, and deny me whatever you think I ought not to have."

She assumed an expression of childlike sweetness and submission that was meant to be very effective, but which looked out of place upon her dark features. Lord Hawkhurst was conscious of not liking her so well in this new *role*. His manner stiffened a little. He disliked affectation of every sort, and it was beginning to dawn upon his mind that his favorite was full of affectation.

"By the bye," said Octavia, "while we were out this morning we made a morning call or two, and went to Oxford street by a new route. In passing a church we saw a bridal-party, and I recognized in the bridegroom Mr. Noble Desmond. It is odd, is it not, that we were not invited to the wedding? I did not even know that he was going to be married."

"It is singular that you happened to see him come out of church, my dear. I did not know until within an hour or so that Desmond was even thinking of marriage. He hasn't troubled himself to inform me of his plans," said the earl. "How did the lady look? She is a widow, I hear?"

"She a widow! Why, she's a mere chit of sixteen, or seventeen, with a fair baby face and red hair—actually red hair, cut off short to her head, and curling in little close rings. Her hair is the color of that red bronze behind you, my Lord."

"I'd like to see Desmond's red-haired widow. I think, my dear, that we'll invite them to dine with us. I

presume the woman is a soap-boiler's daughter and a waterman's widow—Desmond is so odd in his ideas—but she's a Desmond now, and I propose that we receive her into the family and treat her with respect. If we don't like her, we needn't keep up her acquaintance."

"I was about to make the same proposition, my Lord," cried Octavia, eagerly. "We will invite Desmond and his bride to dinner. I want to see her; her appearance interested me greatly."

"They leave for Brighton to-day to remain a week. You can invite a dinner-party to meet them on any day they may appoint. It is true I am not friendly with Desmond, but he's not a man to bear malice. I'll write a note and send it to his office, and it will be forwarded to them. You can issue your general invitations after receiving Desmond's reply to my letter."

Octavia acquiesced to the decision with scarcely concealed joy.

"I'll bring that red-headed woman and Rollyn Conyers face to face," she thought, exultantly. "They shall meet in my presence, and then I shall learn the secret between them!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHAT BERYL DID.

For a moment it seemed to Noble Desmond that his bride was dead. He shouted to the coachman to drive faster—to drive for life! The carriage drew up at last before the door of Mrs. Margle's lodgings. A house-

maid, in a fresh white cap with pink ribbons, opened the door, all smiles and welcome. Desmond alighted, gathered up his bride in his arms and carried her into the house and laid her upon the drawing-room sofa. The coachman hurried in quest of a physician, while Desmond and the housemaid worked for Beryl's recovery. Just as the remaining carriages came hurrying up, Beryl gave a quick gasping sigh and opened her eyes.

"My darling!" whispered Desmond, with yearning tenderness, putting his arm around her. "Lie down. You were very ill for a few moments, but you'll be better directly."

He pressed her back gently upon the pillow. She closed her eyes wearily to avoid being questioned, but her face was strangely drawn and convulsed with an agony whose cause none there could guess.

Desmond explained to Mrs. Margle and the rest that his bride had fainted on entering the carriage at the church. He believed the cause to be physical, some weakness of the heart, perhaps—the doctor would soon tell them.

The lodgers stood about in anxious groups. The carriages were all sent away. Mrs. Margle watched at the door for the doctor, while Desmond hung over his bride, his face strangely set and stern in its awful anxiety.

The physician presently appeared, and was conducted into the drawing-room. Desmond briefly told what had occurred so far as he knew it. Beryl opened her eyes, answered a few questions, but gave no clew to the cause of her illness.

"She fainted from over-emotion," answered the doctor, a little puzzled. "She seems to me as if she had received some sudden and terrible shock, but that,

under the circumstances, is impossible. She fainted simply, but seems quite weak and prostrated. I shall give her a quieting powder, and I advise that she be put in her own bed and left to rest for an hour or two. She will awaken quite herself again. At present, she seems a little dazed and frightened."

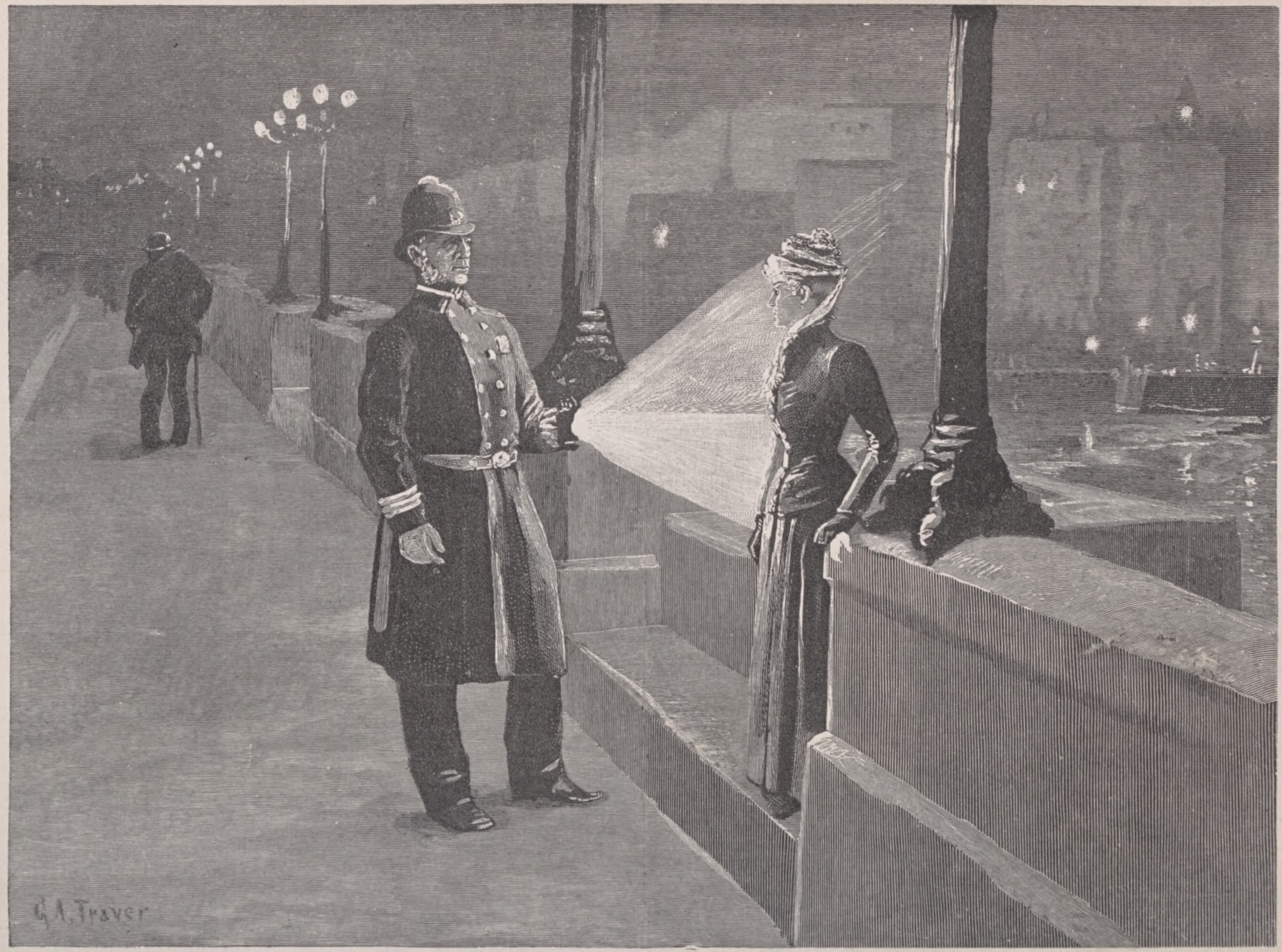
"It's a bad omen to be taken ill like that at her very wedding, as one might say," said Mrs. Margle. "Poor dear, she was expecting to start for Brighton at five o'clock on her wedding tower."

"She'll be well enough to go," said the doctor. "Better take her as you had planned, Mr. Desmond. The change is what she requires. I should say that she is weakened from overwork and the want of proper nourishing food, although in the last I am probably mistaken. A little care and a few days at Brighton will quite set her up again."

The doctor took his leave, and Desmond carried his bride up to her own old room and laid her upon her bed. One of her boxes stood packed and strapped, ready for removal. The other was open, ready to receive her wedding-gown.

Desmond went out, leaving the curate's wife and Mrs. Margle to disrobe Beryl and put her between the sheets. They gave her the composing powder, and went out softly, leaving her to herself. The lodgers and Mrs. Margle went down to the drawing-room, but Desmond sat outside Beryl's door, watchful, listening and anxious.

The powder which the doctor had left for Beryl had been unusually powerful, as was required in her state of suppressed yet terrible excitement. It had taken effect now, and Beryl lay in a dreamless sleep, very like to death, so white, so still, so marble-like, save for the



HE GREW INVOLUNTARILY RESPECTFUL.—*See Page* 230.

dark circles around her eyes. Desmond hushed his breath as he looked upon her.

"She looks like a lily that has been beaten down by the storm," he thought. "What is this trouble that has come to her? One moment happy, the next stricken down into a seeming of death. What is this mystery that has come between us? Has she discovered that she does not love me? I will not believe it. What, then, is the mystery?"

He could not penetrate it.

He stood there a long time, watching her death-like sleep, or trance, as it might have been termed, his very soul yearning over her.

"She will tell me all when she awakens," he thought. "My poor, over-worked, starved little wife!"

He bent over and kissed her. Then, fearing lest he should disturb her, he crept softly out again to his post in the hall.

The afternoon grew late. The hall and stairs grew full of shadows. Mrs Margle came stealing up at last to light the gas, looking very anxious and troubled.

"Mr. Desmond, you'll get your death sitting there in the draughts," she said, in a shrill, exasperating sort of whisper. "And you've not had a blessed morsel of food to eat since breakfast. Come down and have a cup of tea in the drawing-room. The lodgers are all there, and all feel for you in this strange dispensation. The house is like a tomb. The wedding-breakfast hasn't been touched. It's almost five o'clock. You won't be able to go to Brighton to-day."

"No," said Desmond, quietly. "We shall have to wait until morning now. Mrs. Desmond is asleep and may not wake for hours. I think she will awaken quite herself."

"Of course she will, sir. A fainting fit is nothing uncommon. Most girls do faint when they are married, leastways it's a very common thing for them to do," affirmed Mrs. Margle. "It's a sign of feeling, you know, sir. And Miss Star—that is, Mrs. Desmond—she's been overworked lately, as the doctor said, and she has hardly eaten meat once since she came into my house. The excitment in her weakened state was too much for her, that's all."

"Do you think that was all, Mrs. Margle?"

"Law, sir, what else could there be? There was nothing to frighten her. Come down, Mr. Desmond, while she sleeps."

But Desmond declined. Mrs. Margle lit the gas and went below. Presently the curate came up and urged Desmond to descend, and was so earnest in his entreaties, that the young man reluctantly gave in to him, and accompanied him to the drawing-room for a cup of tea. He had eaten nothing since morning, and the slight refreshment now offered him was not unrequired. He was absent from his post not quite half an hour; yet during that brief space of time, events occurred which changed the whole current of his own and Beryl's life.

In the first place, he had hardly descended the stairs, when Beryl awakened. There was no start, no yawn, no slow return to a realization of the events of waking existence, but a keen, sudden and sharp resumption of life as she had left it on dropping into her enforced slumber. The same desolate look that had been in her eyes when she closed them was in them when she wakened. She looked up at the ceiling, around her at the empty room, and slowly gathered up her slight figure and sat upon the edge of the bed.

And now one might have detected that the edge of

her suffering seemed somewhat blunted. A stony calm seemed to hold her in thrall, the calmness of a horrified despair. She passed her hand above her forehead wearily, as if brushing away something that disturbed her. She arose mechanically, and began to dress herself with hands that seemed too stiff to perform their office.

"Poor Noble," she whispered, softly. "It will come hard upon him. If they knew, they would send me to prison, I suppose. And in any case I am not Noble's wife. I know I am not. I am the wife of Dane Conyers, and Dane Conyers is alive. Is Noble bound to me if I am not to him? Will there be a scandal? That would gall him terribly. Oh! if I might sink out of his life as a stone sinks into the river, leaving no trace behind. He would mourn for me, but no shadow of disgrace would darken his life. To die now! To die now!"

She set her white lips together in a straight, thin line, and hastened with her dressing. The garments she had worn that day she resumed, one by one, except her bridal-dress. Her travelling-costume of navy-blue serge was spread upon a chair ready to put on—her purse, her handkerchief, her gloves in the pocket, ready for use. She put it on, jacket and all. Her hat, enshrouded in a gray veil, was on her table. She put that on also. These articles of attire had been made ready before her going forth that morning, for the journey of the evening—the bridal-journey. But what journey was this upon which she was bound?

She felt feverish and cold by turns, and put her hand again and again to her forehead in that dazed kind of way. She was all dressed. A strange excitement began to burn in her veins.

She shuddered and looked over her shoulder with peering, frightened eyes. Half delirious, with the terrors of her situation pressing frightfully upon her, weak and worn from toil and a starvation diet, her perceptions were bewildered. She only knew that she wanted to die.

She opened her door softly and glided like a ghost down the stairs, flight after flight. The drawing-room door was slightly ajar. She could hear the sound of subdued voices, hushed as if death were in the house. The door of the rear parlor was open, also, and Beryl could see the wedding-breakfast set out, with withered flowers. It had not been touched. She listened a moment in hope of hearing Desmond's voice, and then she opened the street-door and slipped out, half maddened, into the winter night, and hurried instinctively in the direction of the river.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BERYL FINDS REFUGE.

The bells were tolling the hour of midnight, when Beryl came out upon Westminster Bridge. She had wandered about all these hours, intent only upon reaching the river. Leaning her head upon the parapet, she looked down into the black river below.

To pray! It was the first time since the great horror of that day had fallen upon her that she had thought of prayer! To pray when heart and brain seemed alike bursting—when her soul was tossed to and fro on waves

of anguish—when her very reason seemed tottering! But she dared not die without appealing to her Maker to forgive her sin. She dared not throw away the life He had given her without asking Him to be merciful to her.

For an hour she sobbed and wept on the lonely bridge, while wanderers like herself flitted past her, or a late cab rattled by, or some stern guardian of the night passed and re-passed, with a watchful eye upon her.

The tears eased her brain and heart. The burning fever left her. Weak and worn and still despairing, she yet had strength to utter a new prayer from the very soul that God would pity and guard her. She looked over the parapet again, but the river had lost its fatal fascination. She shuddered and drew back.

Wrapped in herself, she did not notice the ragged, wretched beings who huddled in the other recessed benches for a few hours' sleep. The policeman who had passed her two or three times appeared again upon the bridge, stirring up the unfortunate ones on the benches and driving them away. They moved on before him like sheep, and made off to arches and doorways they had often haunted.

"Come, you; clear out," he said, roughly, stirring up Beryl with his club, as if she had been a wild beast in a cage. "These here ain't free lodgings."

Beryl rose up, and he flashed the full light of his "bull's-eye" upon her. He saw at a glance that she was not of the same class as the unfortunate women he had just accosted. The fashionable attire; the fair, pure, high-bred face; the gentle, half-haughty reserve of manner, all declared to him that this homeless one was

a lady. He grew involuntarily respectful, although regarding her suspiciously.

"I've had my eyes on you some time, miss," he said, a little less rudely. "Thought you was making up your mind to jump off the bridge. This here is no place for the likes of you. It's nigh on to two o'clock, and you ought to have been at home hours ago. Where do you live?"

Beryl drew away from him, and did not answer. She moved on slowly, as if to beat a retreat. The policeman kept at her side.

"Are you thinking of killing yourself, miss?" he asked.

"No," said Beryl, and low as were her tones the officer felt the truth and sincerity of the speaker. "I shall not kill myself."

"That's right. If you've done anything to offend the old folks, and are afraid to go home, remember that scoldings are better than London streets at this hour. And if you've had a quarrel with your lover, as young women of every degree are always having, just think that suicide and this kind of thing ain't going to make it up. Where did you say you live?"

"I—I don't know," said Beryl. "Please let me alone!"

She flitted on before him swiftly, and sped across the bridge to the Surrey side. She soon found herself in Westminster Road, a quarter of London of which she knew nothing. She shrank from entering the dark and narrow streets, which continually branched away, and kept to the wider and better lighted Road. She reached the obelisk—a central point in the Borough—then passed along the Borough Road, and in a dark and sheltered doorway, near Queen's Bench Prison, she halted to rest.

She thought of Switzerland, where all her years, up to the last few months, had been spent. There was no home for her there. No home for her at Starwood—her uncle's farm; no home for her anywhere. She could think of no possible refuge in this hour of desolateness.

The Borough shops were becoming generally open now, for custom begins early upon the Surrey side of the Thames. An upholsterer's shop was open in the Borough High street, and in a little mirror in the window, Beryl caught a glimpse of her reflection as she passed by. Pale as death, with great, burning eyes and wild, strange gaze, it was no wonder people turned to look after her. She drew her veil down over her face to hide it, and walked on until she neared the London Bridge railway terminus. A small crowd of people were hurrying into the station. She followed them and entered a waiting-room, and took a retired seat.

Putting her hand in her pocket, she found her purse. She had put it in the pocket of her travelling-dress, with gloves and handkerchief, ready for her bridal journey. She had done this before going to church to be married, and had locked her door on leaving her room. She found her money now all intact—a sum of forty-three pounds and some shillings. She drew out a shilling, and as she did so, marked a white address-card in one of the sections of her pocket-book. She examined the pasteboard. It was the card which had been given her by the landlady of the Dover Castle Hotel, at Dover, and bore the address of the London hotel Beryl had stopped at on her arrival in town, and also the address of a quiet lodging-house at Bayswater.

"Why should I not go there now?" the girl asked herself. "It is a long distance to Bayswater, I should

think, and I shall be hidden from Desmond until I can decide upon my future course."

With the address-card in her hand, she went out upon the platform. A train had just arrived. A row of cabs was breaking up rapidly. Beryl signaled "a four-wheeler," gave the address of Portchester Villas, No. 5 Landsdowne Terrace, Bayswater, and entering the vehicle, was borne away to her new destination.

Beryl alighted, dismissed her cab, and rang the garden-bell. The garden was separated from the street by a very tall iron fence, in which were set, at regular intervals, tall iron gates, or doors, which were always kept locked, no intruders being allowed in Portchester gardens. Beryl had time to observe this, before a woman emerged from the area-way of No. 5, with a key in her hand, and came down the walk and unlocked the gate. She admitted Beryl into the garden, led the way to the house, and conducted her up the porch steps, through a narrow hall, and ushered her into a snug dining-room that looked out upon the gardens. She then vanished.

Presently, the door opened again, and the mistress of the house entered. Miss Cavanagh was an Irishwoman, with unmistakably Irish features ; she had a bright and pleasant expression, and possessed, evidently, a jolly, good-natured temperament. She had made quite a sum of money during the last fifteen years, and was decidedly a practical, hard-headed business woman, while she was at the same time warm-hearted and hospitable.

"I am Miss Cavanagh," said the plump, smiling landlady, bowing. "The servant was telling me you wished to see me."

"Yes," said Beryl. "I am Miss Star. The landlady

of the Dover Castle Hotel, at Dover, gave me your address, and I am come to look for lodgings."

Again Beryl told the story of her life in Switzerland, ending with :

"Can you give me a room ?"

"I'll let you have the third-floor front for eight shillings, attendance included," said Miss Cavanagh, her warm Irish sympathies enlisted in Beryl's behalf. "It's taken a fancy to you I have, I'm thinking. It's a sore pity for one like you to be seeking lodgings in London. Come up and look at the room and say will it suit you."

She conducted Beryl up two flights of stairs to a bright little front-room. The walls were covered with gilded paper—the floor with a pretty Kidderminster carpet.

"May I stay now ?" asked Beryl, wistfully. "I dismissed the cab and I don't know where to go if you send me away."

"Come down-stairs again, till Kate lights the fire and makes the room tidy. I suppose you can stay, Miss Star," said the landlady, perhaps a little reluctantly, "but I never took in a lodger in this way before, and it doesn't seem exactly business like—now does it ?"

She led the way again into the warm little dining-room, and Beryl resumed her seat. Miss Cavanagh made further inquiries of her, and Beryl answered her frankly, since none of the questions bore in any way upon the secrets of the young girl's life. Miss Cavanagh seemed to take it for granted that Beryl had just come up from Dover, and Beryl did not enlighten her upon that point, since no especial inquiry was made about the time of her arrival.

Late that evening Beryl sat alone in her cheery little room and wrote a letter to Noble Desmond in these words :

"MR. NOBLE DESMOND: When I quitted Wells street last night, it was to take my own life. I went to Westminster Bridge, but my purpose failed me. I wandered through the streets all night. I have found a shelter now, but where it is I may not tell you. For we can never meet again. I am not your wife, Noble. Our marriage ceremony is all null and void. How can I tell you how it is that you are free? As we stood together at the church door, and I thought I was at the threshold of Paradise, I saw *him* passing by, Vane Conroy—my husband! God pity us both! I shall never see you again, but I shall pray for you till I die; and I hope that in time a happier love may banish all remembrance of me from your mind. And yet—oh, Noble! Life is so hard! Farewell forever. BERYL."

The next morning, closely veiled, and determined to leave no clew by which she could be traced, she went to the general post-office at St. Martin's-le-Grand and posted her letter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SHERWALD ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

After his interview with Octavia, during which she had told him of having seen Noble Desmond and his bride at the door of St. Just's, Lord Hawkhurst sat alone in his library for a long time, busy with his thoughts. He finally wrote a letter to Sherwald, asking him to call on the following day. Then, the question

of Desmond's marriage being still in his mind, he requested his solicitor to seek out Desmond and deliver to him a letter which he inclosed, Sherwald knowing, and the earl not knowing, Desmond's address. The inclosed letter was a somewhat formal congratulation to Desmond upon his marriage, and contained an invitation for Desmond and his bride to dine at Hawkhurst House upon any day they might appoint. The letter was dispatched upon the following morning.

Upon the evening of the same day on which the letter was sent, Mr. Sherwald made his appearance at Hawkhurst House, and was shown up to the library.

The earl was standing by the fire. He came forward and offered Sherwald his hand, and in the warm mutual clasp the old harmony between them was restored. Lord Hawkhurst made no apologies for his rudeness on the occasion of their recent interview, nor did the solicitor expect an apology, but the manner of each had its old cordiality and freedom.

"Sit down, Sherwald," said the earl. "I wanted to see you again about the leasing of the Blackborough farm. We didn't come to any decision in regard to it, you may remember."

The solicitor sat down, as requested. He looked grave and preoccupied, and the earl was not slow to observe the fact.

"You look troubled," observed his lordship. "I hope it is not on account of what transpired at our last interview. I assure you that while you were hasty and over-zealous, yet I do full justice to your motives. Here we drop the matter. And now about the Blackborough farm. Have you made inquiries about this Harley who wants to lease it?"

"Yes, my Lord," said Sherwald, quietly. "If you

will excuse me, I will speak first of what is most prominent in my mind. My friend, the barrister I alluded to in my conversation with you the other day, has Mr. Desmond's address, and on receiving your inclosure I went around to his chambers with your letter to your young kinsman. By a strange coincidence, I found Mr. Desmond in the barrister's office."

At this juncture the door of the library opened and Conyers came sauntering in. When he beheld Sherwald, he muttered an apology for his intrusion, and turned to depart, but Lord Hawkhurst bade him remain.

"I have a little matter of business I wish to talk with you about, Conyers," said the earl. "Mr. Sherwald, this is Rollyn Conyers, Esq., the heir of my title and property. Conyers, let me introduce to you Mr. Sherwald, our family solicitor, the chief manager of my estates, and my greatly valued friend."

The darkly handsome face of Conyers, with that nameless charm and fascination about it, to which we have heretofore alluded, made a striking impression upon the keen-eyed solicitor.

"It has been represented to me that your income is inadequate to your wants, Conyers," said the earl, as the young man sat down with easy grace and a lounging attitude, "and I had some conversation with Sherwald upon the matter the other day, and have arrived at a decision which, I trust, may meet your approval. I believe that your own income amounts to eight hundred a year."

"Precisely, sir."

"Mrs. Conyers has a handsome fortune," pursued the earl, "but I can quite understand your reluctance to live upon her money. I might get you a position under government where your natural abilities would find

play, and you would gain both honor and money. What would you say to that?"

"I should decline it," said Conyers, earnestly. "No money could recompense me for being tied to an office. I'd rather be my own master."

"I am not afraid of work," said Lord Hawkhurst, gravely. "I doubt if many laboring men in the kingdom work harder than I. But I shall not urge you into any course. I have only to say that I will give you a thousand pounds a year. That sum, added to your eight hundred, makes a very respectable income, especially as Mrs. Conyers has ten thousand a year in her own right. Is this satisfactory?"

Now in truth it was not. Lord Hawkhurst had thirty thousand a year of clear, unencumbered income, besides houses in town and country, and one thousand a year only to his declared heir seemed to Conyers paltry and mean, the more especially as he secretly bore in mind that his wife's pretensions were all baseless, that she had no private income whatever, and that her extravagances must be paid for by him out of a sum supposed to provide only for his own.

"It is satisfactory," said the young man, a little sullenly. "You are very kind, Lord Hawkhurst, but, after all, eighteen hundred a year seems small."

"I consider the income you will have ample, considering that you will have only yourself to provide for," said the earl somewhat sternly. "Mrs. Conyers has a magnificent home, and keeps her own carriage, and pays her own milliner. If you cannot pay your tailor, and keep a hunter and your own private single brougham out of your income, I shall be unable to assist you further at present. When you stand in my place you may have my income. While I am Earl of Hawkhurst I intend to keep

up the dignity in suitable style. I hope you understand me."

"I am certainly very grateful, my Lord," said Conyers, more gracefully, conscious that the lawyer was watching him. "I am sorry if I have appeared dissatisfied. In truth, I am delighted. In what way am I to obtain this income?"

"I shall pay it out of my own pocket, half-yearly. I will give you five hundred pounds to-day."

He sat down at his desk and drew a check for the amount named and handed it to Conyers, who took it with a flushing cheek and a look of annoyance.

"Is not this too much after the manner of paying one's tradesmen, my Lord?" asked the young man. "Suppose I were to be out of England, or you were to be ill, how then shall I obtain this sum semi-annually?"

"I will make provision for it. Hereafter it will come to you regularly through Sherwald's hands. He will remit it to you without your application for it. The subject grows unpleasant. Let us drop it."

Conyers bowed, and stuffed the check in his pocket. The sparkle in his eyes and the flush on his cheeks told plainly of his secret rage, but he was wise enough to restrain all expression of it in words.

"We were talking, as you came in, of Desmond," said the earl. "So you met Desmond to-day, Sherwald? Did he send a reply to my letter by you, or must he first consult his bride before he can appoint a day to dine with us?"

"Mr. Desmond was in serious trouble," said the solicitor. "He looked wild and haggard. He had run in to see his friend for the purpose of obtaining his advice."

"In trouble?" cried the earl. "Had his widow jilted him at the last minute?"

"No; they were married yesterday; but as they entered their carriage at the church-door, Desmond's bride fainted dead away in his arms, and she did not revive until after her return home—"

"H-m! That's queer!" interrupted Lord Hawkhurst. "Why, Conyers and Mrs. Conyers happened by a singular chance to see the pair as they came out of the church, and neither of them spoke of her fainting. Conyers, had she fainted when you saw her?"

Conyers muttered a negative.

"It was very sudden," said the lawyer; and he told as much as he knew of Beryl's disappearance.

"Desmond tracked her," he said, "to Westminster Bridge. He has discovered that she sat for an hour upon that bridge, and the policeman who was on that beat last night says that she meant to destroy her life, but that he drove her off the bridge, advising her to go home. The young lady seen by the policeman answers to Mrs. Desmond's description in every particular, even to the costume. The policeman says she went over to the Surrey side, and he lost sight of her. He thinks she may have kept along the river till she gained Blackfriar's Bridge, and then flung herself over."

"Poor Desmond!" said the earl, forgetting his former anger against our hero. "Poor fellow! Go to him, Sherwald, and tell him how I sympathize with him. Advise him to set all the police upon the track of his fever-stricken wife. My purse is at his disposal. If they find her, let them bring Mrs. Desmond here. Poor girl! Poor Desmond! Let our business go for to-night, Sherwald, and find Desmond. Leave me his address, and I'll see him myself in the morning."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A BAD LOOK-OUT FOR CONYERS.

Upon the morning succeeding the receipt of his instructions, Sherwald visited the barrister, to whom repeated allusion had been made, and obtained Desmond's address in Wells street.

In sad contrast with his surroundings, was the desolate figure of Desmond. The young man had recently come in, and had flung himself upon a low couch which he had found drawn up before the fire. At Sherwald's entrance, Desmond raised himself, and turned toward the intruder a thin, white face, in which burned two haggard eyes—a face so worn and sharpened with anxiety and grief, that Beryl herself might scarcely have recognized it.

The young man arose with difficulty, yet with an instinctive courtesy that could not desert him even in his misery. He had not undressed nor slept since Beryl's disappearance, and was physically exhausted.

"I am Mr. Sherwald, Lord Hawkhurst's solicitor," said the visitor. "I am come to you from the earl. Pray lie down again, Mr. Desmond. I shall go at once if you do not."

Desmond uttered some faint words of apology and sank back upon his couch, again motioning his visitor to be seated.

Sherwald drew a chair to the corner of the hearth, where he would be in full view of his host, and sat down.

"Lord Hawkhurst has heard of your marriage, Mr. Desmond," he said, plunging into the subject at once, "and also of the sad affliction that has followed it. He desires me to offer to you his hearty sympathy, and he begs you to use his purse as if it were your own in prosecuting your search for the missing lady."

The tone and manner of the solicitor were full of respectful sympathy.

Desmond's lips quivered.

"He is very kind," he said. "I have no need of money, but I thank him for his kindness."

"Have you found no clew to Mrs. Desmond yet?" asked the solicitor.

"None—none!"

"I have heard something of the sad story from our mutual friend Mr. Dallas, in whose office I saw you yesterday morning," said the solicitor, gently. "I am come here as your friend, Mr. Desmond, and as Lord Hawkhurst's friend, and not as an inquisitive curiosity-seeker. If I can be of any assistance to you, I beg you to command me."

The gentleness of Sherwald's manner, the genuine air of sympathy, touched Desmond's tortured heart.

"I cannot think that she is dead," he said, "and yet she was wild with fever, and may have flung herself into the river while in a paroxysm of delirium. But if she is not dead, think of her wandering alone, sick with fever, helpless, beautiful, friendless! We have searched the hospitals—every place where she might be—but from the moment in which she crept away from Westminster Bridge, at the rough command of the policeman, all trace of her seems lost!"

"Is it not strange that a fever should come upon her so suddenly?"

"Perhaps so. She was herself at the church, and I saw no indication of approaching illness then. She has been a daily governess, ill-paid and overworked. The excitement of the marriage proved too much for her and precipitated her illness."

"Could she have had any possible reason for flight?" asked Mr. Sherwald, gravely. "Pardon me, Mr. Desmond. Don't be offended. Every possibility should be considered in a case like this. Was there any mystery in her life? Was there any one of whom she was afraid?"

"She had no one to fear—no one. She was a mere child in years—only just seventeen—but she was a widow. Her first marriage had been unhappy. She was educated in Switzerland. Last June she became acquainted with a young Englishman, and married him at Geneva in August. In September he lost his life in attempting an ascent of Monte Rosa. She never wore mourning for him. She had not really loved him. She knew no one in England, had no enemies, and her flight is to be explained only upon the grounds of brain fever."

Sherwald was thoughtful.

"Did she take anything with her?" he asked.

"Nothing—not even her dressing-bag! I hope you may be able to help me to some light on this subject," said Desmond, wearily. "My brain is all confused. Come with me up to her room, Mr. Sherwald. Everything is as she left it. You shall see that even her jewelry is there, and you will comprehend, as I do, that her flight was but an impulse of her fever. Come."

Desmond arose and took up a lamp from his table and led the way up-stairs. He had the key of Beryl's room in his pocket and unlocked her door and ushered Sherwald in.

The alcove in which stood the bed was shut off by the glazed doors. The grate was empty. The room was chilly and desolate. One trunk, strapped and labeled, stood near the door. The dressing-bag—a wedding-gift to Beryl from Desmond—stood on the table. Another trunk stood open in the center of the room to receive the wedding-garments. The wedding-robe was thrown upon a sofa in a careless heap. In the tray of the open trunk was the brief remnant of the jewelry that had belonged to Beryl's mother, and which had been given to Beryl by her uncle, William Star, upon the occasion of her memorable visit to Starwood. Some of this jewelry had been sold to procure the garments necessary for Beryl's second marriage, but a few pieces still remained.

"Is her purse gone?" asked the solicitor.

"It's on the table, empty," said Desmond.

Beryl's old pocket-book, indeed, lay there. She had procured a new one before her second marriage, the old one being too shabby for further use; and, as has been explained, the new pocket-book, with over forty pounds in money in it, had been in the pocket of her travelling-suit when she had fled.

Sherwald examined the empty purse, and wandered about the room, examining object after object. He came to the open trunk, and having asked permission, looked over the little store of jewels.

"She would not have left these if her flight had been premeditated," he thought. "Of course, the poor girl, in a paroxysm of brain-fever, went and drowned herself."

There was a set of silver filigree jewelry, broken and discolored, as it had come to Beryl. It was of small value now, save as a memento. But the article of most

importance was a necklace of gold beads in tiny cubes, each cube set with a minute diamond spark. The clasp was set with a large gem of the purest water. The ornament was very quaint and peculiar, and attracted Sherwald's keen attention.

He turned it over in his hands, seeking to find an inscription upon the clasp, or amid the delicate engraving covering each golden cube, but he found none. Desmond did not heed his absorption, having covered his face with his hands.

"Was this a gift to Mrs. Desmond from you, sir?" asked Sherwald, at last, holding up the necklace on his hand.

Desmond started and looked up, shaking his head.

"I never saw it before," he said, hollowly, and hid his face again.

"Will you lend it to me for a day or two?" asked the solicitor, eagerly. "I will return it soon."

Desmond nodded assent.

Sherwald rolled up the necklace in a bit of paper, and stowed it in his pocket. The two presently returned to Desmond's rooms. They had scarcely done so, when the postman's knock was heard, and the housemaid came hurrying up with a letter for Mr. Desmond.

Sherwald took it at the door, and delivered it to his host. The young man took it idly, glanced at the address, and sprang up as if galvanized, his face flushed and wild.

"From her! From her!" he ejaculated. "She is not dead!"

He tore open the letter, and devoured its contents.

"Not dead! Oh, what an exquisite relief!" he said, when he had read it again and again. "It is as I thought. She wandered away in her fever. She meant

to kill herself, but did not. She has a vagary of her fever still, but she says she has found shelter. Oh, my darling, my love, my wife, where is she?"

He gave the letter into the solicitor's hands, and began to pace the floor in a wild excitement.

Sherwald read the letter attentively, every faculty sharpened to keenness. He saw no vagary of fever in that profound despair of Beryl's. He started when he read that she had seen her husband, whom she had believed dead, at the very door of the church, after her marriage to Desmond. His face changed color when he read the name of Vane Conroy, as the name of her first husband.

"Poor child! My poor, fever-stricken little wife!" said Desmond, in an agony of yearning. "You see her chimera! She had worked too hard and had not been well nourished. She fell ill from over-excitement, and doubtless fancied that her first husband had come back from his grave to reproach her for her too speedy marriage with another! Where can she have found refuge? Has some good Samaritan taken her in? Or is she in evil hands? I must go to the police-station at once with this new clew."

He seized his hat as he spoke.

"Wait," said Sherwald, pityingly. "My dear Mr. Desmond, you go upon the ground that your—that this lady is delirious. Let us talk the matter over. Did she see her husband buried after his death?"

"No; they never found his body. It slipped into a crevasse."

"Ah! Can you bear my opinion, Mr. Desmond?—though it's only my opinion. I think she is not delirious at all—only nearly wild with despair."

"How—what?"

"I think," said Sherwald, steadily, "that her former husband was not killed in Switzerland—that he counterfeited death to be rid of her—that he was in London—that she has seen him!"

Desmond dropped into a chair, weak as one dying.

There was water on the table. The solicitor filled a glass and placed it to the young man's lips.

"Leave me," said Desmond, in a whisper. "I want to be alone."

Sherwald longed to utter words of comfort, but here he was dumb. He stole out of the room softly, as from the presence of a dying man.

He returned in his cab to his own law-chambers, in a wide court off High Holborn, and very near to Lincoln's Inn Fields. A tall, lank clerk was standing upright, and was hard at work copying folios. He looked up at his employer's entrance, bowed respectfully, answered a few questions, and resumed his work.

Mr. Sherwald threw off his hat and overcoat, warmed his hands at the dull fire, and said:

"If Lord Hawkhurst should drop in, show him into my private room, Hallet. I will see no one else to-day."

The solicitor passed into the adjoining room, stirred up his fire, walked around his room once or twice, and then sat down at his desk and proceeded to examine anew and at his leisure the peculiar necklace Desmond had lent him.

"I thought last night that Conyers had some secret interest in this mystery of Mrs. Desmond," he muttered. "What if Vane Conroy, the man who was supposed to have perished on Monte Rosa, should be Rollyn Dane Conyers, the future Earl of Hawkhurst? Is the idea too improbable? Let me think. Conyers was on the

Continent when Lord Hawkhurst summoned him to England. He was at Geneva. He must have received the earl's letter about a week before the supposed death of 'Vane Conroy.' The earl confided to me his plans concerning the disposal of Hawks' Cliff. He intended to make that one of his two young kinsmen his heir who should marry the heiress of Cragthorpe, and so unite that estate to Hawks' Cliff. Suppose he mentioned that intention in his letter to Conyers? Suppose Conyers conceived then the idea of ridding himself of his young wife—taking it for granted that Mrs. Desmond was his wife—and so planned his pretended death. She believed in his death. He came to England, won the heiress, married her. His wife, thinking herself a widow, marries Desmond. But how happens it that Desmond never suspected Conroy and Conyers to be the same? It was Conyers whom Mrs. Desmond saw at the church door. She fainted at sight of him. By Jove! I've found the very heart of this mystery!"

"The necklace is old," he said, a little later, arousing himself by an effort. "It must have been in Conyers' family a long time. I wonder if Lord Hawkhurst would recognize it. He used to know Conyers' father well in their youth, and may have seen this very necklace in his possession. The proud heiress of Cragthorpe has a bitter humiliation in store for her. And as to Mrs. Desmond, where is she? Can she have taken refuge in Conyers' protection? He is her husband."

Greatly perplexed and troubled, the solicitor pondered the case, going over it incident by incident, putting hitherto unconsidered facts together, until a network of circumstantial evidence had become inextricably woven about Dane Conyers, and he had no longer the faintest doubt of Conyers' guilt.

About the middle of the afternoon, while he still sat in a brown study, Lord Hawkhurst was ushered in.

The solicitor sprang up and greeted his employer, and assisted him to remove his great-coat.

The earl accepted a seat.

"Have you seen Desmond to-day?" he asked, abruptly.

"Yes, my Lord. I found him at his lodgings."

"Has he found his wife?"

"No, my Lord; but he got a letter from her while I was there. It seems she is safe somewhere; she did not say where."

The earl knitted his brows together fiercely.

"You don't mean that the girl is an adventuress, and has been making a fool of Desmond?" he demanded, sharply.

"No, sir. She supposed herself a widow, and is a good, honest woman, I dare say, else Desmond would not go mad about her. She is but a young thing, only seventeen. She was supposed to be a widow since last October, but the truth is, as I understand it," said the solicitor, "her worthless husband is not dead, but has turned up again."

"Then Desmond has married a woman with a husband living!"

"That seems to be the truth, my Lord."

"Poor fellow. We must have him up at Hawkhurst House, at once. Conyers and Octavia must cheer him up! He must not be allowed to blight his career by running away and hiding himself in some foreign country, as he'll be apt to do. The woman must have been in great haste to marry again, upon my soul! What was her first husband? A gentleman, or a costermonger?"

"He called himself a gentleman, no doubt," said Sherwald, who was in no mind to declare to Lord Hawkhurst the entire truth concerning Dane Conyers until he could prove every charge he should make.

"The thing must be kept out of the newspapers," said the earl. "Don't let the rascally reporters get hold of it, or there'll be no end to the scandal. Desmond has picked his pearl up out of the gutter, indeed, and has fallen into the gutter himself! I believe the woman is a designing creature, just what you called Mrs. Conyers, you remember. Poor Desmond! Sherwald, I have a good mind to double that thousand a year I set down in my will for Desmond. Poor devil! He doesn't deserve his ill-fortune. Get me my will."

The solicitor unlocked the great door of the safe. The upper half of the interior of the huge receptacle was divided into pigeon-holes, which were all appropriately labeled. From one of these holes he drew out the will of the earl which had been so recently executed.

Lord Hawkhurst broke the seals of the envelope and glanced over the document. He was dissatisfied, he hardly knew why.

"I'll make a new will altogether," he said, thoughtfully. "Of course, Conyers is to be my heir; but I like Desmond, and I would like to make better provision for him. Sherwald, I'll will him Hawberry Grange. That's worth two thousand a year, and is a gentleman's residence, worthy even a Desmond. Draw up an entirely new document precisely like this, with that single change in regard to Desmond. As to this—"

He leaned over the high wire guard and laid the document upon the fire. It blazed up and burned to ashes.

Sherwald started; then drew a breath of relief.

"I wish, my Lord," he said, earnestly, "that in the new will you would place the name of Noble Desmond as your heir."

"And have this scandal of his perpetuated to all futurity?" scoffed the earl. "No, sir. No man with any stain upon his name shall inherit Hawks' Cliff by my consent. The future owner of my estates must not only be a man of honor—Desmond is that—but he must be one whom no breath of scandal has touched, whose life is spotless, whose marriage is an honor to his family. See Desmond again. Tell him to get rid of this woman. We must marry him off to some noble lady, and settle him at Hawberry Grange. People will then forget this escapade of his; for a marriage with a woman whose antecedents are not known is an escapade. Draw up the new will, Sherwald, and I'll sign it at my leisure. There's no hurry. I shall live fifty years yet, perhaps. But Desmond can have Hawberry to live on as soon as he marries to suit me."

The earl watched the blue thin ghost of the burnt will flicker on the coals, and then turned away and paced the room. Sherwald went back to his safe.

Suddenly Lord Hawkhurst gave a great cry and bounded forward, clutching at the necklace upon the solicitor's desk. The earl's face was purple, his eyes starting, his breathing stertorous. Sherwald hastened to him thinking him threatened with apoplexy.

"This—this?" gasped the earl, shaking the necklace. "Whose? Where?"

He sat down trembling and weak.

"That?" said the amazed solicitor. "That—I think her first husband gave it to her. You recognized it, my Lord?"

"Whose? Whose is it?"

"Hers—the woman with two husbands, my Lord. It belongs to Desmond's wife!"

"To Desmond's wife. Then let it be your first task, Sherwald, to find Desmond's wife! Merciful Father! What does it all mean? Desmond's wife? Desmond's!"

The earl stuffed the necklace into his pocket. He asked presently for a little brandy, which Sherwald gave him. Then he went away, grim and impenetrable, with a mighty shadow on his brow.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT THE EMBROIDERY SHOP.

Beryl lost no time in seeking something to do. Upon the morning following her establishment at Portchester Villas she sought Miss Cavanagh's advice and assistance as to her future.

"I can teach French, Italian, German and English," she said, "as well as drawing, music and embroidery. I would like to get a situation as a daily governess."

"Sure, and you ought to get a paying one with those accomplishments," said Miss Cavanagh. "Why don't you advertise in the *Times*, child, which all the rich people take? I'll let the housemaid take down the advertisement."

Thus counseled, Beryl wrote a modest little advertisement and procured its insertion in the "Thunderer."

Pending its appearance, she procured materials—satin, gold thread and silk flosses—and set to work at embroi-

dery. The advertisement brought in no application for her services, and another notice was sent into the *Times* seeking employment at sewing and embroidery. This also met with no response.

Beryl worked for five days, early and late, upon her sofa-cushion. She had made the design herself. It consisted of a wreath of white lilies upon a pale-blue satin ground, each lily exquisitely embroidered, and with long golden stamens, that added great effect to the whole picture. Beryl folded it carefully in linen and tissue paper and set out to dispose of it.

At length, she paused before the plate-glass window of a shop in Regent street, devoted to ladies' fancy-work and the materials therefor.

There was a carriage standing before the door, with coachman and footmen in livery, but Beryl did not notice it. She pushed open the door. A lady was sitting at the counter, attended by two obsequious shop-women. Beryl passed on a few paces and sat down, trembling a little and nervous.

The lady was of a rather large frame, dark, with hard black eyes, and a severe compression of the lips. She was handsome after a bold but unlovely type. Her forehead was nearly hidden under a short fringe of crimped hair, which nearly reached her eyebrows. She was very fashionably attired in a long, dark-blue velvet carriage-dress, and tunic trimmed with silver fox-fur. Her hands were ungloved and sparkled with jewels. Her hat was worn far back on her head, and was of dark-blue velvet, with a mass of nodding plumes. Her eyebrows were visibly penciled by the hands of art; belladonna had been employed to give luster to her eyes; and the flush on her cheek was due to the skill of the chemist.

This lady was Octavia Conyers.

And so met the two wives of Rollyn Dane Conyers!

The one poor, forsaken, wronged, seeking to earn her bread, the other disdainful, supercilious, scheming and wicked, hastening to spend money upon which she had no righteous claim.

The one was light, the other was darkness. The one was good and pure, the other full of deceit and wickedness. And both were wives of the same man! They were to Conyers his good and evil angels. And he had forsaken his good angel and cleaved to his evil angel, and what was to be the end, God alone knew.

No subtle instinct warned these two women of the singular relationship between them. Octavia was looking at embroideries. She had bought some Berlin work for her maid to ground, but was seeking something better and handsomer, and was loud in her expressions of dissatisfaction at what was offered her.

Presently, one of the shopwomen approached Beryl and asked what she desired.

"I have some embroidery of my own work, to sell," said Beryl, in her low, cultured voice, that was clear and sweet and low as the trill of a bird. "Will you look at it?"

Before the shopwoman could answer, Beryl displayed her work. The woman examined it critically and admiringly, asked the price put upon it, and shook her head.

"Let me see it," said Octavia, imperiously. "Bring it to me, girl."

Beryl did not resent the domineering tone, but with a perfect good-breeding came forward quietly and displayed her handiwork.

"That suits me," announced Octavia, after a close ex-

amination of it. "I never saw better work, even in Paris. I will take this. What is your price?"

Beryl threw back her veil. The shopwoman, offended at the rival merchant practicing trade in their own shop, drew back, and would have shown her anger but for a wholesome awe of Mrs. Conyers, who was their frequent customer, and whose rank, social position and expectations they well knew.

"I ought to have a guinea for the work, at the very least, and ten shillings for the materials—they cost me that," said Beryl.

Octavia looked up from the work, and for the first time obtained a view of Beryl's face. It was very pale and thin and wan, with a mournful look in the haunting eyes, a pitiful smile on the sad, sweet mouth, but it reminded Octavia, nevertheless, of the proud, lovely face she had seen at the door of St. Just's—the face of Desmond's bride. The sun had shone on the bride's bright countenance, and had lingered on her clustering rings of red-bronze hair. This girl had tiny, clustering rings of bronze-colored hair. Could it be the same girl? Could this be the bride who had so strangely disappeared, as Octavia had been already informed? It flashed upon Octavia's mind that the girl was, indeed, Desmond's missing bride.

She reflected a moment. Her decision was rapidly made.

That Conyers knew this girl she felt assured. That the girl's disappearance had something to do with her sight of Conyers on that fatal wedding-day, she also was convinced. She meant to probe the mystery to the bottom.

"I think this work worth more than you ask," she

said, smilingly. "I will give you five pounds for it, and consider it cheap at that price."

Five pounds! Beryl doubted that she heard aright, the more especially as Octavia's mouth, despite its smile, had an expression of cruelty about it, and Octavia's hard eyes glittered unpleasantly. Five golden sovereigns were counted out to Beryl from a delicate silver portemonnaie. The girl took them with a vague wonder that any one should pay her more than she asked.

"I want a set of chair-covers," said Octavia. "They must be very elegant. Can you design something to suit me?"

"How would you like a ground of white satin, every chair-cover to be different?" asked Beryl. "One should have a wreath of pale pink buds and green leaves on a white satin ground; one a wreath of blue-bells; one of pale pink roses; one of fuchsias; one of golden-hearted lilies; one of reddest roses. I might improve on these. Would the idea please you?"

"Excellently well," said Mrs. Conyers. "Please go at the work at once. When one is done, bring it to me at Hawkhurst House, Park Lane."

Octavia took up the embroidery she had bought, made a few further purchases of the shopwomen, thus soothing their ruffled feelings, and then moved toward the door. Beryl had accepted her tacit dismissal, and had already passed out at the door, and was halting a moment on the step.

"I will take an omnibus home," she thought. "I feel tired. How generous the lady was! I am sure to earn my living now, and lay up money against sickness and old age."

She moved out upon the walk and stood at its outer edge, watching for the proper omnibus to convey her

home. Her veil was still thrown back that her sight might not be impeded. As she thus stood, looking into the roadway, Dane Conyers, coming up the street to rejoin Octavia, beheld her. He knew her on the instant, despite her black garments.

"Beryl, as I live!" he muttered. "And there's the Hawkhurst carriage. Octavia can't be far off. What a frightful risk! She might see Beryl. Ah!"

Beryl signaled an omnibus, and waited for it to draw up at the curbstone. In the same moment Conyers signaled a four-wheeled cab, ordered the driver to keep the omnibus in sight, and follow the lady in black when she should alight. Beryl entered the omnibus and went on her way, and Conyers in the cab, his coat-collar drawn up around his face, followed after her.

"I must see her!" he muttered, uneasily. "She has run away from Desmond. She must have informed herself about me by this time. She knows just who I am. She may mean to go to Lord Hawkhurst and expose me. I must have an interview with her, and learn on what terms she will keep silence!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

Unconscious of pursuit, Beryl alighted from the omnibus in the neighborhood of Kensington Gardens and continued her journey on foot. Dane Conyers alighted from his cab, also, at a convenient corner, dismissed the vehicle, drew down his hat to shade his

brows, drew up his coat-collar still higher, and walked on slowly, keeping the girl's slender, graceful figure well in view.

Beryl did not look around as she rang the garden-bell at No. 5 Portchester Villas. The servant Kate gave her admittance. Conyers at last approached the garden-door of No. 5, and boldly rang the bell.

Kate appeared in response to his summons.

"I have called," said Conyers, hesitatingly, uncertain by what name to speak of Beryl, "to see a cousin of mine whom I understood to stopping here. She was a Miss Star, but—"

"Oh, it's Miss Star you'r wanting to see, is it?" interrupted Kate, catching at the name. "If she's your cousin, sir, of course you can see her. She's at home. Come in, sir."

She opened the gate and he passed in. She conducted him into the house, and would have ushered him into the drawing-room, but he drew back.

"Don't let me trouble you, my good woman," he said, politely, removing his hat and turning down his coat-collar. "I will run up to my cousin's room, if you please. Just tell me which one it is, and I'll find it by myself and give my cousin a pleasant surprise."

The girl hesitated a moment. It did not seem to her quite proper that the young gentleman should go up to Beryl's room ; but then, he was her cousin, he said, and a cousin is surely a near relation. Unfortunately, Miss Cavanagh was not in the house. Kate's doubts were suddenly set at rest by Conyers, who placed a half-crown in her hand.

"It's the third floor front, thank you kindly, sir," said she, courtesying.

Conyers glided up the stairs. At Beryl's door he

paused a moment, then turned the knob and entered. He locked the door softly. As the bolt shot home with a gentle click, Beryl turned her head and saw him. For one breathless moment she stood as if transfixed. Her face whitened, her eyes dilated, and a look of mingled terror and horror stiffened her features.

"Dane!" she said, in a hollow whisper.

"Yes," he said, trying to speak lightly. "You don't seem glad to see me, Beryl. Is this your welcome to your husband? Is that mourning garb for me?"

"For you!" she said, with a shudder, clinging to the back of a chair, her voice quivering with a bitter scorn. "*For you!* Why should I wear mourning for you? I am not likely to wear mourning for a man whose true name I do not even know."

Conyers's heart gave a quick, exultant leap.

What! She did not even know his name! Then she could not have told Desmond her story! She had imposed upon Desmond some fictitious tale concerning a "Vane Conroy," perhaps. She was not dangerous as he had feared. His wily, scheming brain comprehended the entire situation, and mapped out a course upon the instant which he believed might save him yet.

"Is this my welcome back to life?" he asked, reproachfully. "Is it for this I escaped death? Instead of receiving me with open arms, as I expected, you treat me as your enemy."

"What are you but my enemy?"

"Why are you so cold and cruel to me, Beryl? What have I done to offend you? Why has your love for me turned to hatred?"

Beryl's face flashed scorn upon him.

"You ask me that?" she demanded. "After that scene in the garden of the Villa Belvoir, when you flung

me from you in your fury at the discovery of my obscure birth and my poverty? After your desertion of me—after your pretended death on Monte Rosa—after those revelations of your true nature in your diary? You have scorned me, hated me, wronged me, deserted me, pretended that you were dead, that you might be rid of me—and yet you ask me why I do not receive you with open arms? I never knew before how poor and pitiful a man's soul could be."

Her slender figure was drawn up; her splendid eyes were full of fire; her glorious face was full of proud and passionate bitterness. A thrill of admiration went through Conyers's breast, and his old love for her was quickened to new ardor.

"There is some mistake here, Beryl," he said, quietly. "I have been base and cruel, but if any man ever repented his faults I have repented mine. Hear me, Beryl. Let me speak in my own defense. When I left you at the Villa Belvoir, I was half-mad with disappointment. I hurried away to Geneva, intending to return to you when I should have become reconciled to my lot. I could not return to you while any of my anger remained. And so it happened that I made that excursion to Monte Rosa, hoping to find in the excitement of travel my old tranquility of mind. I own all my faults, the baseness of those entries in the diary, my weakness, my follies, my reverence for birth and rank, my love of money—I confess to all these, Beryl, but I deny that I ever pretended death."

"You—deny—it?"

"I do. I made the ascent of Monte Rosa with Huplick, my valet. In descending, I made a misstep and went whirling downward and fell headlong into an opening among the rocks known as the 'Devil's Chim-

ney.' I caught upon a projecting rock only a few feet below the mouth of the fissure, but Huplick must have been frightened out of his senses, for he did not even stop to rescue me, but hurried off to Zermatt for assistance. I crept out of the opening after long struggles and toils, which even now I cannot bear to recall. I was bruised and bleeding, more dead than alive, in good truth. Some time the next day I reached a rude Alpine hut and fell senseless on its threshold. And then consciousness failed me, and I never knew more until three months later. I had been ill during all that period, nursed by rude and incompetent peasantry, who had retarded rather than helped my recovery. But life and strength and memory came back at last by degrees and slowly. I found that I was in an Italian *chàlet*, out of the usual routes of tourists, and the people who had nursed me had been too ignorant to make any effort to find my friends."

He wiped his brow as if his recollections were most harrowing to his soul.

"A month ago I made my way back to Geneva," he resumed, " and found that I was believed to be dead. The newspapers had narrated my accident and chronicled my supposed death. I hastened to the Villa Belvoir, but it was tenanted by an English family. I could find no trace of you, and none of Huplick. I went to Bassett's *pensionnat*; you were not there. I heard from some one at Vevay that you were gone to England. I hurried here. I have searched London for you, and came upon you at last by accident one week ago. At last, my wife, we are re-united, never more to be separated! Forgive me, Beryl, for all my faults and follies. I have arisen from my sick-bed a better man. I will be henceforth all that you can desire."

He arose and approached her with open arms.

"Back!" she said, retreating before him.

"Beryl—my wife!"

"You have told your story," said Beryl, "and it may be all true. God forgive me for doubting you if it is. What is your real name?"

"Vane Conroy."

"You married me, then, under an assumed name. Our marriage was not legal."

"Yes it was. You believed it to be my name, and the fact that no fraud was intended renders the marriage legal. Any book of law will tell you that. I acknowledge you as my true and lawful wife. I love you, and I beg you to forgive my wickedness. Think what I have suffered."

Again he essayed to approach her.

"Back!" she said again, with a gesture of command. "I have something to say to you. Our past is dead. I can never be to you again what I was once. I never loved you—never. It was but a girlish fancy I felt for you, and that fancy—which you might have quickened into love—died long ago. Since I came to England I have found what true nobility in man really is. I have loved—I have married. When you and I met the other day by the little church of St. Just, I was just from my second bridal, and he upon whose arm I leaned was the man I had just married."

"Married! Married!"

Conyers appeared to reel under the blow.

"I knew you on the instant. A deadly terror griped at my heart. I fainted, and was taken home. I was ill for hours. At evening I stole out to destroy my life, but God saved me and brought me to this refuge."

"What is the name of this second husband?"

"His name cannot matter to you. You never knew him," said Beryl. "I do not think I could bear to hear his name on your lips. He is free, and I pray that he will soon forget me."

"You did not intentionally commit bigamy," said Conyers, "but I can forgive the crime more easily than the speedy forgetfulness of me. I loved you—you were my wife—and in four or five months after my supposed death you married again. I am punished for all my faults."

He bowed his head as in sorrow. Beryl's pale countenance did not change.

Presently Mr. Conyers seemed to revive a little and to recover a share of hopefulness.

"We have both erred," he said; "you have committed bigamy—a crime that is punished with penal servitude—and I have been harsh, wayward, wicked. Your fault brings us nearer together. You can no longer stand afar off upon the heights of your solemn virtue. You must come back to me, for, notwithstanding your second marriage, notwithstanding all that has come between us, you are my true and lawful wife."

Beryl shrank back before the glitter of his black eyes, the flaming passion of his darkly handsome face. He scowled blackly as he saw the signs of her aversion.

"Come back to you?" she said. "Never!"

"Is this the wife I won on Lake Leman?" he asked reproachfully. "Is this the wife who walked with me in the moonlight in the garden of the Villa Belvoir? Then you were tender and loving; now you seem to hate me. You promised to love, honor and obey me till death should part us. Is it thus you keep your vow?"

"Would you chain to you a woman who hates you?"

"Yes, if that woman were my wife—yourself! The tie that binds husband and wife is indissoluble. We have both of us much to forgive, Beryl, but let us forgive and forget. You must make allowances for the faults of my education, and overlook all that has disturbed you in my conduct. And I will overlook your speedy forgetfulness of me, and this second marriage of yours, and take you back again to my arms and heart. Is this agreed upon?"

A stormy look came into the girl's eyes.

"No, it is not!" she said, impetuously. "We are done with each other forever. Go your way, Dane, and leave me in peace. The only happiness I can ask for now is to be freed from your presence forever."

"And to be permitted to live with your second husband in peace?" sneered Conyers. "Is he here with you?"

Beryl grew pale.

"You know he is not," she said, her voice quivering with anger and insulted virtue. "How dare you speak to me like that? Go away—go! I pray that I may never see your face again."

"That prayer won't be answered," said Conyers, coolly. "I have found you, and I shall not lose sight of you again. As your husband, I have a right to compel you to live with me, and I intend to exercise that right. I have a little place in Northumberland. I shall take you there—"

"I'll die first."

"Beryl, you know not what you are saying. I am your husband. I love you—"

"I would rather you hated me. Understand me, Dane, I will die before I go back to you!" cried Beryl,

her mutinous face indescribably beautiful, and stirring up all his passion for her in one wild bitterness. "I never loved you, although I thought I did. I am your wife, but I shall henceforth be so only in name. I respect the holy bond of marriage more than I can tell you, but I do not respect you—I do not love you. Believing you dead, I learned to love another. I love him now with all my soul, and I shall love him till I die; but I shall never see him again. I shall never see you again either. I shall live out my life alone, apart from the man I love and from the man I hate. Never speak to me again of love, Dane Conyers."

Conyers could have gnashed his teeth at her cool rejection of his professed repentance and his eager advances. Beryl seemed immovable as stone. He felt that his boasted fascinations were all powerless here. He determined that he would not give her up, that he would make some compromise with her to gain time, and to cover himself from detection and consequent ruin, and that he would devote every effort to the task of winning her back to him.

"Beryl," he said, in a tone and manner whose extreme quietness contrasted strongly with his recent vehemence, "I will not use the authority which the law gives me to compel you to live with me. I will leave you your freedom until you choose to return to me voluntarily, provided that you will agree never to mention our marriage to any living soul, that you will not call yourself by my name, and that you will never lay any claim to your position as my wife."

"I agree to all that willingly."

"Swear to keep your agreement. Swear that you will never speak my name, nor claim to be my wife!"

"I swear it. I will never lay any claim to you, you

may rest assured. I will never mention your real name or your assumed name, unless indeed it should become my imperative duty to do so, and that it will not."

"How could it become your imperative duty to claim me as your husband?"

"Have you not thought that your visit to me in my rooms here will make an unpleasant situation for me? Miss Cavanagh thinks me a total stranger in London—"

"That is all right. I told the servant that I was your cousin. Remember your oath to conceal our marriage. I will agree not to force you to live with me again, provided that you never claim to have been married to me, that you never seek to recognize me when we meet, and that you never seek to molest me in any way so long as we both live."

"I agree to all that."

"I know I can trust your word. I love you still, Beryl, better than I ever loved you before. If you will not come back to me, I would still give much to shield you from the world. How do you support yourself?"

Beryl pointed to her work-basket.

"With your needle? This must not be. I have a little money, an annuity that dies with me," said Conyers, falsely, "and you must share it with me. A hundred pounds a year would keep you in comfort. You are my wife, Beryl, and cannot decline to allow me to support you."

"But I do decline to allow you to support me. I will never take a penny of your money. I am doing very well now. A noble lady at the West End has engaged me to do embroidery for her, and pays me liberally. I shall get more work through her perhaps when her order is finished, and shall lay up money. I will not take money I have not earned."

"Very well, then. Have your own way; yet I should be glad to spare you all toil. Perhaps some day you may think more kindly of me, and will be willing to accept a home at my hands, even if I may not share it with you."

He sighed heavily as he arose. He moved toward her, and she retreated to the window.

"You will not even shake hands with me?" he said, bitterly. "And yet I have more to pardon than you have! Well, then—good-bye."

He bowed deeply, and hat in hand, walked slowly to the door. At its threshold he paused, and said, reproachfully:

"You might have made me what you would. Whatever becomes of me now, the fault must lie with you. The wife who is recreant to her trust is more to be blamed than the husband who errs. May God forgive you, Beryl."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A GLIMPSE OF THE MISSING BRIDE.

Noble Desmond could not be persuaded to take up his abode at Hawkhurst House, although the earl called upon him in person and urged him to do so. All of Desmond's faculties were engaged in a search for Beryl. He refused to believe that she had seen her first husband at the door of St. Just's church, as she had declared in her letter to him. He thought the idea a chimera of her fevered imagination.

Mr. Sherwald came often to see him, and joined actively in the search for Beryl, but the solicitor kept his own counsel jealously. He would not declare his belief that "Vane Conroy" and Rollyn Dane Conyers were one and the same person, but he did tell Desmond that he believed Beryl's story was true; that she had seen her first husband, and that the latter was alive and in London. He had not since alluded to that belief in speaking to Desmond, but prosecuted his search with unceasing effort.

After the first two or three days, Sherwald pursued his search alone, but came to Wells street every evening to compare notes with Desmond and to accompany him upon a stroll through the streets. The solicitor found himself so occupied that he had not time to prepare the draft of the new will Lord Hawkhurst had ordered. It is more than possible that Sherwald intended to defer the execution of the will until he should be able to prove to the earl that Conyers was unworthy to be his lordship's heir.

Mrs. Margle, anxious to do something to assist in the recovering of the missing bride, remembered that Beryl had left articles of needlework on sale at a ladies' repository and a bazaar in Oxford street. Desmond seized upon this clew and followed it up, but Beryl had not been to either place to inquire after the results of her labor. A little more than a week after Beryl's disappearance, Desmond sat alone in his chambers in Chancery Lane. The hour was late afternoon, approaching evening. He had been hard at work since morning. He had heard of a mysterious young girl at Clapham, whose description tallied with that of Beryl. He had accordingly visited Clapham, spent the day in searching for the mysterious young lady, and had succeeded at

last in finding her, but she had proved to be a young actress who was in hiding from her father, and he had returned discouraged and disheartened. Unable to bear the questionings of his fellow-lodgers in Wells street, he had come to his chambers to spend an hour or two in solitude.

The janitor had made a cheery fire in his grate, and its red glow lighted up the dull room. The floor was carpeted. The walls were lined with books. There was a couch at one side of the chimney, there were easy-chairs, a reading and a writing-desk. It was a snug little bachelor's retreat.

There was a knock upon his door. Before he could speak it swung open, and Dane Conyers came sauntering in.

"Are you here, old fellow?" asked Conyers, with seeming heartiness. "Oh, there you are! Don't rise, I beg. I just dropped in upon you for a few minutes. Lord Hawkhurst insisted upon my coming, although I was anxious myself to see you. You are not looking well."

"Help yourself to a chair, Conyers," said Desmond. "Is Mrs. Conyers well? Is Lord Hawkhurst in good health?"

Conyers wheeled up a second lounging-chair, and flung himself into it in a careless attitude.

"Mrs. Conyers is well, thank you," he said, easily. "I think that Lord Hawkhurst is not very well. He does not seem quite himself lately. I haven't seen you since we were at Hawks' Cliff Castle together, Desmond. What changes a few months have wrought!"

"Yes, indeed, what changes! You are married to Miss Windsor of Cragthorpe, and your prospects are most brilliant. I—"

"You are married, too? I have heard from the earl your sad story, Desmond—how your bride was stricken with fever at the very altar, and wandered away from you in a fit of delirium. Accept my earnest sympathy. I am very sorry for you, Desmond."

He spoke with such a seeming of sincerity as to touch Desmond's heart. The latter silently extended his hand, and Conyers grasped it fervently.

"It is a sad occurrence—very sad," said Conyers, sorrowfully. "Did you know her before you went to Hawks' Cliff?"

Desmond shook his head, signifying a negative.

"I understand that she was a widow?"

"Yes; and only seventeen years of age," said Desmond. "She lost her husband by an accident, after a month's marriage. He lost his life in an ascent of one of the Swiss Alps. Her first marriage was a sad affair altogether. We never talked of it. I know only the barest outlines of it. But I do know that her first husband was a villain. She never wore a mourning dress for him, and I am sure she did not mourn for him in her heart. Had circumstances been different—had she not been so ill-paid and hard-worked—we should have deferred our marriage for a year; but even that small mark of respect for his memory was not deserved by him."

"He must have been a villain!" said Conyers. "Poor young lady! She was well rid of him. What steps have you taken to find her?"

Conyers's exultation was carefully concealed in his own heart. He saw that Desmond had not the faintest suspicion that "Vane Conroy" was no other than his present guest. He seemed to himself to be in ambush—to lie hidden and unsuspected behind his screen of

fair and honest seeming. Only yesterday he had visited Beryl at Bayswater, and to-day he was playing the sympathizing friend to the man who would give all he owned to know Beryl's whereabouts.

"I have employed a detective," said Desmond, "but he is not the best on the force, and I have little faith in him. The detective I desired to employ is up north engaged in working up a case. I depend most of all on my own exertions and on Sherwald."

"Sherwald! Not Lord Hawkhurst's solicitor?"

"Yes. By the directions and wishes of the earl, Mr. Sherwald is working with and for me. He is a very sagacious man, Conyers."

"Yes," said Conyers, absently. "So Sherwald is working with you. It's odd—deuced odd, you know. I don't like Sherwald."

"He is very clever."

Conyers moved uneasily. The suggestion of Sherwald's cleverness was not pleasant to him.

"Have you issued any handbills?" he inquired. "Have you put up any placards, or anything of that sort?"

"No," said Desmond, his fair face flushing. "We could not do that. There was a possibility, you see, Conyers, that she—Mrs. Desmond—was not delirious, after all, and that she is living quietly somewhere, and to advertise her publicly as one would advertise a strayed horse would not do at all."

"You look tired out. My carriage is below; let me take you to your lodgings. I don't like to leave you moping here. Come, Desmond. You may find a letter there, you know."

The feeling which Desmond had experienced of Beryl's proximity to him returned with renewed force. Con-

yers's words seemed a prophecy of good. He arose, put on his great-coat, and they descended the stairs together.

Conyers set Desmond down in Wells street, and drove on to Park Lane.

Desmond went up to his own rooms and lighted his lamp. There was no letter for him on his table. He locked his door, turned down his light, and sat down at his window, gazing down into the street.

No one came to disturb him, his entrance into the house having been unnoticed, thanks to his latch-key. The dull twilight deepened into night. The hours wore on, and still Desmond did not stir. But suddenly he drew a quick, sharp breath, and leaned forward, his eyes glowing, his face whitening.

Out from the shadows between the gas-lamps on the opposite side of the street, a slender, girlish figure was moving slowly. She was dressed in black, and her face looked muffled. Her gaze was fixed upon Mrs. Margle's house—upon Desmond's windows. Opposite the house she paused, continuing to look. He could not see her face, but her attitude was one of unutterable longing, of profoundest sorrow.

Some one drew the parlor blinds in the house over the way, and a sudden stream of light fell upon the slender figure in black. At the same moment a fitful gust of wintry wind blew her veil back from her face. Wan and sorrowful, thin and pale, it was still the beautiful young face of Beryl.

Desmond ran down the stairs and out of the house. Beryl saw him coming, and flitted away like a spirit. She turned into Oxford street. When he also turned the corner, she had altogether vanished. She had come and gone like a spirit in a dream.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GUIDED BY FATE.

About a fortnight after Beryl s disappearance from Wells street, Lord Hawkhurst sent a peremptory summons to his solicitor to come to him at once. Mr. Sherwald obeyed, arriving at Hawkhurst House about nine o'clock in the evening, and before the earl had come up from the dining-room.

Sherwald was shown into the library as usual. The earl presently joined him. The solicitor's face expressed his surprise at the change a few days had wrought in the appearance of his lordship. And yet it was hard to tell in what the change consisted. It was only that his step was languid when it had always been quick and ringing; only that the ruddiness of his visage had faded somewhat; that his massive features looked shrunken and pinched, and that his eyes seemed unnaturally keen and bright.

"Are you ill, my Lord?" said Sherwald, involuntarily.

"No. What senseless questions people ask!" said the earl, fretfully. "Ill! I am never ill. Be good enough to remember that, Sherwald. Why have you not been here within a week? Do you expect me to hunt you up? Sit down."

Sherwald obeyed, continuing to regard his employer with a look of solicitude.

"I have been very busy during the past week, my Lord," he explained. "I sent you a note nearly every

day to let you know how I was getting on, but I had no news to bring. I have not made out the draft of the new will yet—"

"Bother the new will! There is no hurry about that. There's time enough for wills during the next twenty years. I want to know about Desmond. Has he found his wife yet?"

"No, my Lord."

"But I told you to look for her—to leave no means untried to find her."

"I have searched for her, but have not yet been successful," said Sherwald. "I shall keep up the search, my Lord."

"Perhaps she's killed herself. Women are fools, anyhow," growled the earl. "If she had remained with Desmond I might have seen her and asked her a few questions. I should like to know how she came into possession of that necklace."

"Probably her first husband gave it to her," suggested Sherwald.

"Her first husband? Yes, yes, probably; but where did he get it? That's the question. I'd give a good deal to see this young woman, Sherwald," said the earl, restlessly. "I must see her."

"We shall soon find her, my Lord, if she's alive. Desmond is devoting his life to the search for her, and I am doing the same," said Sherwald, inwardly convinced that the earl suspected Conyers of being Beryl's first husband, and thus accounting in his own mind for the earl's solicitude to find Beryl. "We shall leave no stone unturned in our search. By the way, my Lord, does Mr. Conyers know that the will devising all your property to him has been destroyed?"

"Certainly not. He knew of the existence of the will,

but it is not necessary that he should know that it has ceased to exist. I shall make another will immediately, and he will lose little by the change."

"It is still your purpose, then, my Lord, to make Mr. Conyers your heir?"

"Certainly. Why should I change my expressed purpose? He is honorable, has an unblemished name, and has never done anything to blush for. True, he has sowed his crop of wild oats, but all young men do that. I can forgive prodigality, recklessness and folly in young men, but I could never forgive wickedness and crime, nor that folly which Desmond has committed, of linking himself to a woman who is no doubt an adventuress."

Sherwald looked thoughtful and troubled. He regarded the earl with a keen scrutiny, taking note of the change in his appearance, but he did not venture again to remark upon it.

"I hardly think Desmond's wife is an adventuress," he said, arousing himself. "Desmond thinks her an angel. This anxiety is wearing him out. He's a noble fellow, my Lord, although I own that he was imprudent in marrying a woman whose history he did not fully know. But that fault is not common among young men in this day and generation, you must grant. As to the lady, I do not indorse Desmond's theory of fever, or hallucination, or what not."

"You don't? What do you think, then?"

"I think that she actually saw her first husband, as I said to you once before, my Lord."

"A pretty state of affairs!" muttered the earl. "Desmond married to a woman who has another husband living? Preposterous! I wonder the woman don't kill herself. Is she of foreign birth?"

"No, my Lord. She was educated in Switzerland, but was born in England."

"Her name was Conroy, you said?"

"Her first husband's name was Conroy. Her maiden name was Star."

"What!"

A great agitation convulsed the earl's countenance. His face flushed; his eyes flamed.

"What did you say her name was?" he demanded.

"Star—Beryl Star. Desmond told me yesterday—"

"Star! Her name Star! That accounts— Yes; I understand. I—I understand—"

Lord Hawkhurst walked away to the window. He was silent for some minutes. When he returned to the fireside, he was calm and quiet, but startlingly pale, and his eyes still glowed and burned like lamps.

Sherwald's conviction that his lordship knew something concerning Beryl's first husband, or suspected more, received confirmation in the earl's singular agitation.

"I should like to see Desmond's wife," said Lord Hawkhurst, calmly. "For his sake, we must scour London—England even—to find her. The scandal must be kept hushed up, you understand. I feel tired, Sherwald. I'm not equal to business this evening."

He flung himself into a chair and threw back his head upon the cushions, his massive throat thrown into full relief. He looked tired and haggard. Sherwald's concern for him got the better of his discretion.

"My Lord, I wish you would see a physician," he said. "I don't think you are at all yourself—"

"Pshaw! I'm well enough. I hate a pack of meddling croakers!" growled the earl. "There—there! You mean well enough, no doubt, Sherwald, but I am

not ill. I'll take a run down to Hawks' Cliff for a few days. The stiff salt breezes will set me up. Nasty weather we've been having."

The conversation drifted into other channels. An hour later the solicitor took his leave.

He had scarcely departed when Lord Hawkhurst began to pace his room as a lion walks his cage.

"That name!" he muttered. "This girl belongs to the same family. Her possession of the necklace proves that. This Beryl Star is William Star's daughter. No doubt he's married and has a large family. But how came the necklace in his hands? Can it be that after the lapse of years I shall find a clew to *her* fate? Is she alive or dead? I must see William Star. I will run down to his place to-morrow."

Toward noon of the next day, the knocker was sounded, and the becalved and beplushed hall-porter opened the door. A young lady dressed in black, with a small parcel in her hand, was standing on the stone steps. The hall-porter admitted her into the marble-paved hall, and she asked to see "Lady Hawkhurst."

The young lady was Beryl.

The hall-porter smiled as he assured her that there was no Lady Hawkhurst.

"There must be some mistake, madam," he said. "My lady has been dead for twenty years."

"Then it must be her daughter I am come to see," said Beryl. "The address was certainly Hawkhurst House, Park Lane. I call by appointment. My name is Miss Star."

"Perhaps," suggested the servant, "it is Mrs. Conyers you wish to see."

Before Beryl could reply, Octavia's maid, who was

peering over the balusters on the upper stair-landing, called out, sharply :

"If the young person has come to see my lady about some embroidery, Butters, let her come up. She is expected."

Beryl flitted across the hall and up the stairs. The lady's maid received her at the landing and conducted her up to the next floor, ushering her into Octavia's boudoir.

Mrs. Conyers was alone. She wore a dressing-gown of white cashmere, and a profusion of scarlet ribbons. Her black hair was heaped high upon her head in fashionable dishevelment. Her hard black eyes grew bright at sight of Beryl, and she greeted her visitor with a gracious smile.

"I rather expected you to-day," she said, condescendingly. "Pray be seated, Miss—Miss—"

"Miss Star," said Beryl, simply. "I have finished one of the chair-covers, madam, and have brought it for your inspection. I inquired for you as Lady Hawkhurst. The servant spoke of you as Mrs. Conyers, I think. May I ask if that is your name?"

"Yes," said Octavia, carelessly. "It's a common name enough, but my husband is of a very aristocratic family. He will be the next Lord Hawkhurst."

"I suppose the name is common," said Beryl, who had been curiously pale. "Permit me to show you my work, madame. I designed the pattern myself, and have made drawings of the remaining patterns, that you may see if you like them."

She unrolled her parcel, displaying a square of white satin upon which was exquisitely embroidered a wreath of pale pink roses.

"How lovely!" cried Octavia. "You have genius,

Miss Star. I wish I were clever like you. My chairs wiil be the envy of all my friends. How beautifully those roses are shaded ! I never saw handsomer needle-work even in Paris."

Beryl was pleased at these warm commendations. She began to unroll her tiny parcel of drawings.

"Sit down here at the fire, Miss Star," said Mrs. Conyers. "Lisette, you may go."

Beryl sat down at the corner of the hearth in a low Marquise chair, and exhibited her designs. Mrs. Conyers admired them all, and expressed her admiration in warm terms.

"You will make your fortune," she said. "I shall want a second set when these are done, and shall recommend you to all my friends. You ought to adopt a French name. As 'Madame Etoile'* you would receive double prices and double fame. You know what the world is, Miss Star. But I dare say you could not speak French."

"Oh, yes, madam," said Beryl. "I was educated in Switzerland, and speak French and German as fluently as I speak English."

"Oh, indeed," said Octavia, congratulating herself upon the ease with which she was ingratiating herself in Beryl's confidence. "I fancied I detected a foreign air about you, Miss Star. I was educated in Paris. You seem young to have left school. Have you experienced a reverse of fortune? Have you parents living?"

"I am alone in the world, madam," said Beryl, with a quiet dignity that impressed even Octavia. "I have no one to support and no one to support me. I suppose I was educated to become a governess but I am not

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*Star.

able to find a situation, having no one to recommend me."

"Embroidery like this must pay better than teaching. I should not think you would be obliged to work a great while to support yourself. That beautiful face of yours ought to secure you a rich husband."

Beryl flushed and drew herself up with hauteur.

"I beg your pardon if my freedom has offended you," said Octavia. "I am awkward, perhaps, in paying compliments. I was interested in you, and fancied I could read a whole romance in your black dress and lonely position. I should have been pleased to be of service to you, but, as you intimate, we will confine ourselves to business. I will pay you for the chair-cover you have brought home. Here is the money."

She counted out the five sovereigns she had agreed to pay.

"I should like my husband's opinions upon the remaining designs," she continued, smoothly. "He has the tastes of an artist, and will admire your work, I am sure. I will call him."

Her heart throbbed fast with an evil exultation as she went through her dressing-room into that of Conyers.

"Rollyn," she said, maliciously, "come into my boudoir. I have something lovely to show you."

"All right," replied Conyers. "I'll be along in a minute."

Octavia returned to Beryl.

"My husband is coming," she said. "I do hope he will admire your work, but of course he will like them if I do. He is perfectly devoted to me, thinks me an angel, and so on, but that's a weakness of young husbands, I suppose."

Beryl was silent.

Octavia listened impatiently for Conyers's step. She was eager to solve the mystery of the relations existing between this beautiful girl and Rollyn Conyers. That they had known each other she was sufficiently assured. That it was the sight of Conyers that had stricken Beryl down at the door of St. Just's church she was convinced. She believed that the two had known each other in Switzerland, and that Conyers had made love to Miss Star, and had won her love. She believed even that Conyers might have betrayed Beryl into a mock marriage, Huplick officiating as clergyman; but not one thought of the actual truth penetrated her mind. How could she suspect that Lord Hawkhurst's heir was actually and legally married to Beryl Star, and that she, Octavia Windsor, was not his wife! Had she suspected the hideous truth, she would never have admitted Beryl into Hawkhurst House, would never have schemed to bring her face to face with Conyers, and would have devoted every energy to the task of crushing her rival out of existence. Her suspicions were become to her almost certainty. The desire to verify them, and to lay bare Conyers's secret, was become almost feverish.

"I think, Miss Star," she said, as the silence grew oppressive, and Beryl betrayed a sudden restlessness, "that I will have a set also in pale-blue satin, the designs entirely different. Ah! There comes my husband, now!"

She arose, her face glowing with triumphant malice.

A careless step crossed the dressing-room floor, the door opened, and with the words of an opera-song upon his lips, Dane Conyers came sauntering into the boudoir.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A DAWNING OF LIGHT.

In the first moment of his entrance into Octavia's room, Conyers did not see the slender figure in black at the corner of the hearth. His eyes rested upon Octavia, who stood, evilly exultant, near the door.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded. "What are you grinning at, Octavia? What has happened? The earl isn't—"

"Hush!" said Octavia, with a start and a quick glance over her shoulder. "I've been making a purchase, dear, and I want your opinion. Come, see this lovely embroidery. Miss Star—"

Beryl rose slowly up, white as death. Conyers turned his gaze upon her, and glared at her.

They confronted each other for a brief space, in a dead silence. Conyers's face grew livid. He stood as one at bay.

Octavia's jeering laugh rang through the room.

Beryl dropped back into her chair. Conyers muttered an oath so savage that even Octavia shrank back from him, and he strode toward his wronged young wife, his visage terrifying in its blazing wrath, its savage, uncontrollable fury.

"You here!" he said, in a hissing voice. "You have tracked me, then? You have broken your oath? You have told your lying story to this lady? You—"

"Stop!" said Beryl, with a stern voice, her sweet face

grown stern also. "Are you this lady's husband, Dane Conyers?"

"You know it. Have you not told her?"

"Then that story was all true. You had a wife living."

Conyers looked from Beryl to Octavia, and back again.

"This lady," said he, indicating Octavia, "is my lawful wife. How dare you come here? How dare you track me—"

"I have not tracked you. I came here to bring some work which this lady engaged me to do. I did not know that you lived here," said Beryl. "I have discovered you in your real character by accident. And this lady is your wife, also?"

She looked at Octavia pityingly. Her rival flushed back a look of hatred.

"She is my lawful wife," said Conyers, driven to desperation, yet struggling to maintain a calm front. "Octavia, what has this girl been telling you?"

"Nothing. I suspected that you had known each other, and contrived to bring you together in order to verify my suspicions," said Octavia, coolly. "Who is this girl, Rollyn?"

"I knew her in Switzerland," he answered. "I had a passing fancy for her, and we went through the form of marriage, but I took care that the form should lack legality. Why, she is base-born and poor, and was being educated to become a governess. I amused myself with her for a month and then left her. She found her way to England and entrapped Desmond into a *bona-fide* marriage, and then ran away from him. That's her history."

"Ah!" said Octavia. "Does your side of the story differ from this, Miss Star?"

"Is his name really Conyers—Rollyn Dane Conyers?" asked Beryl, gravely.

"Yes, that is his name."

"He pretended that that name was assumed. It is the name he was married under. We were married at Geneva, Switzerland, by an authorized clergyman, in the English church, in the presence of witnesses, on the twenty-fourth day of last August, and our marriage is duly registered," said Beryl, solemnly. "Was your marriage prior to that, madam?"

CHAPTER XL.

FACE TO FACE.

Octavia caught her breath sharply. Conyers met her gaze with one of sullen fury and defiance.

"You invited the woman here, madam," he said, ironically, "and I wish you joy of her. You can hear her trumped up stories if you choose. I did marry her, but the marriage was not legal. Her name is not Beryl Star. Heaven only knows her parentage!"

Beryl's form quivered as under a blow. Conyers addressed himself to her.

"I am Lord Hawkhurst's heir, and shall be next Earl of Hawkhurst. Do you think I would ally myself to a nameless creature like you? Does it look reasonable? Our marriage was not legal. Find your clargyman and

witnesses, and see what they will prove. You have no more right to my name than to that of Star. Dare to attempt to hunt me down, and you will rue the day you were born. Any charge against me must recoil on yourself. According to your own story, you have two husbands living!"

"I have not come here to expose you, and I have nothing more to say," said Beryl, quietly. "I am poor and friendless, but I would die in the Thames sooner than take my position as your wife. It may be all as you say. I may have been cheated; the marriage may not have been legal; you may have been previously married to this lady. Whatever the truth, I shall never seek to know it, I have no friends to be wounded by my misfortunes, and I am content to leave my case in the hands of Him who knows all. But I can never sink so low as to lay any claim to you, Dane Conyers. You and this lady need have no fear of me!"

Her lip curled in a scorn she could not conceal. She arose and took up her scattered drawings, the most cool and self-possessed of the three.

"I am sure I don't fear you," said Octavia, insolently. "You did right not to call yourself by my husband's name, girl. Yon need not trouble yourself to complete those embroideries for me. Rollyn, dear, will you open the door?"

Conyers sprang forward and did her bidding. More, he went out into the hall with Beryl, and appealed to her, in a whispering voice, to keep his miserable secret and spare him from exposure.

"Our marriage was not legal," he said, eagerly. "I imposed a fraud upon you. Octavia is my actual wife, but I loved you better than I have ever loved her. Will

you keep your oath, Beryl, not to betray the fact of our marriage—yours and mine?"

"I shall never break my word, Dane. I promised to keep the secret so long as you let me alone. I believe it is possible that I may be your lawful wife, but I am only too glad to be released from the hateful bonds our marriage imposed upon me. I do not know quite what is right, nor quite what is the truth, but I cannot be doing wrong in leaving you and her in peace. Rest assured, I shall not expose you!"

She moved toward the stair. He went back into Octavia's room, heavy-hearted and sorely troubled.

Octavia met him with the countenance of a fury.

"Is that creature's story true?" she demanded. "You have no timid, ignorant school-girl to deal with now, whom a word can deceive. I demand the truth from your lips, if you can speak the truth. Was that creature known as your wife? And were you married to her, as she said?"

"That creature's story in so far is true."

"Was—is she your lawful wife?"

"No. There were irregularities that made the marriage null and void. She was pure and good, and thought herself my wife. If she had been well-born and rich, I should have made the marriage legal."

"Can I believe you?"

"You are better aware of your own capabilities in that line than I am," he replied, scoffingly.

"Will the girl make a scandal?"

"No; I have her word—her sworn oath—that she will never proclaim our marriage. She's honor itself, and would go to the stake rather than break her word. You have nothing to fear from her."

"But have you nothing to fear from me? Suppose I expose you to Lord Hawkhurst."

"And cut yourself out of a home? Come, come Octavia. Let my faults alone. You were an incarnate fraud, pretending to be an heiress and all that, and you couldn't have expected to ally yourself to an angel. I have overlooked your faults; you must overlook mine. To expose me is to ruin yourself."

Meanwhile, Beryl had descended the stairs. As she gained the lower hall the door of the library opened, and Lord Hawkhurst, attired for a journey, a book in hand, came out, meeting her face to face.

He stood still, as in a species of fascination. Something in the pale, spirited, lovely face touched his heart; or it might have been the sad, unconscious beseeching in her vivid brown eyes, as they were uplifted to him. He noted that she had a small, noble head, crowned with short, red curls; that her beauty was of a striking and glorious type, and that she had the bearing of a lady. He supposed her to be a morning visitor of Octavia.

He raised his hat to her almost unconsciously, and halted, with a respectful gesture to her to pass on. Beryl bowed in acknowledgment of the courtesy and walked on. He looked after her, his hat still in his hand, his soul in his eyes.

As she neared the vestibule, her small fur boa fell from her neck. She caught it, adjusted it, and in doing so detached the necklace she always wore, with its pendant ornament—the pigeon's-blood ruby. Lord Hawkhurst saw it fall; but before he could speak, Beryl had passed out of the door and was gone.

The earl hurried forward and caught up the ornament. A single glance at it was sufficient to plunge him into a

most profound agitation. He clutched it tightly in his hand and bounded out into the street.

Beryl was not in sight, but a cab was whirling down the street, and he sprang to the conclusion that she was in it.

"Too late!" he muttered. "What was she doing here? I must know!"

He put the necklace in his pocket and strode back into the house. He deposited his hat in the hall and hurried up-stairs to Mrs. Conyers's boudoir. Octavia's voice bade him enter. Octavia herself met him just within the door, her face bearing traces of great recent passion.

"Is it you, my Lord?" she ejaculated, in a real alarm. "Won't you come in? This is an unexpected honor."

She believed for the moment that Beryl had told her story to his lordship. A moment's reflection assured her that there had been no time for such communication, and her courage began to return to her.

"Excuse my abruptness, my dear," said Lord Hawkhurst. "I have not come for a visit, only to inquire the name of the young lady who passed out just now. Who was she, Octavia?"

The sickening sensation returned to Octavia's heart.

"Young lady!" she faltered. "I have seen no young lady this morning."

"She did not see you, then? Strange! She came down the stairs. She was unmistakably a lady. I am sorry to have disturbed you. I will ask Butters. I ought, indeed, to have done so at first."

A consultation between his lordship and Butters would inevitably result in a discovery to the earl that the visitor had been up to Mrs. Conyers's apartments. Octavia took the alarm.

"Stay," she said, pretending to reflect. "Was the person about whom you are inquiring, a young girl dressed in black?"

"Yes, yes."

"Has she red hair?"

"Yes; she has red hair."

"I remember, now," said Octavia. "Why, she is but just gone. You called her 'a young lady,' and that misled me. She is only a sewing-girl whom I have employed to work embroidery for me. She just came to fetch home her work. There it is on the table yonder. I should so like your opinion of it. I paid her a very extravagant price for it."

"A sewing-girl!" repeated the earl, mechanically. "What is her name?"

"Mary Jones," said Octavia, uttering the first name that occurred to her. "She is supporting her invalid parents, she told me. A very worthy young woman, sir."

"Yes, yes, no doubt," said the earl, breathing heavily. "And her name is Mary Jones! I—I thought—excuse me, my dear; I will go down again. I shall not be in at dinner. I am about to make a little journey, and shall probably not be home till morning. Good-by, my dear."

He held out his hand, shook hers warmly, pressed a kiss on her dark forehead, and hurried out.

"What do his inquiries mean?" questioned Octavia of herself, when his heavy tread was heard descending the stairs.

She hastened to her husband's dressing-room.

Lord Hawkhurst returned to the lower hall and again put on his hat. He was anxious and excited. He believed Octavia's story implicitly, yet some undefined

impulse caused him to question the hall-porter as he opened the door to go out.

"Butters," said he, speaking with affected carelessness, "the young lady who went out just now lost her necklace, as you saw. I must take means to restore it to her, if she should not return to inquire after it. Mrs. Conyers tells me that she is a sewing-girl. If she should come again let me know. I want to see her. Do you remember her name, Butters?"

"Yes, my Lord. She said it was Miss Star."

"What! What name did you say?"

"Star, my Lord."

Lord Hawkhurst passed down his steps and moved down the street. He signaled a cab at the nearest corner, and soon after was seated in a first-class compartment of a railway-coach, whirling swiftly through the winter day and the Surrey country, on his way to Starwood.

CHAPTER XLI.

LORD HAWKHURST AT STARWOOD.

The short February afternoon was drawing to its close when Lord Hawkhurst drove in at the open gates of Starwood farm, and alighted at the hospitable porch.

The cabman blanketed his horse, and sank down deeper into the warmth and protection of his manifold capes, while the earl rang the knocker loudly. Steps were heard shuffling over the bare floor of the hall, and old Margot, with a candle held far above her head, and

with a peering gaze in her old sunken eyes, looked out at the visitor.

"Is it news of the master?" she asked, in a querulous voice. "Oh, it's a stranger, eh? Come in, sir. Come in!"

She flung the door open wide, and Lord Hawkhurst entered the hall, which, uncarpeted and unfurnished, was dreariness itself. Old Margot, her candle still held above her head, the yellow light flickering with her movements, led the way through the long hall to the kitchen, or "house-place" beyond.

"There is no fire in the master's room," she said, apologetically. "Sit down, sir. Did you wish to see the master?"

The earl replied in the affirmative, with a curious glance about him and at the old housekeeper.

"The master went away quite unexpectedly, last night," explained old Margot. "A gentleman came up from London with ill news, and the master went away with him, saying he should not return under a day or two. Perhaps, sir, you are come upon the same business as the other?"

She looked at the earl sharply. He rubbed his gloved hands together, but shook his head, as he replied:

"My business has no connection with that of any other. Can I not see Mrs. Star?"

"The master is not married, sir."

"Not married? Can I not see his sister—his father—"

"He has no sister, sir. And his father died, seventeen years ago, of a broken heart," said old Margot, as calmly as if she were mentioning a very common disease.

The earl had half risen. He sank back in his chair again.

"A broken heart! That's a rare malady," he observed, but his voice had lost something of its calmness. "Is there no lady at the head of Mr. Star's house, my good woman? Has he no confidential friend, no trusted relative, with whom I can have speech for a few moments?"

"There's no one but me, sir. The master lives here like a hermit, as one might say. I know all his family affairs better than any one beside himself. I minded the master when he was a wee lad, as gay and lightsome as he is now hard and bitter. I nursed Miss Jenny in these arms from the very hour of her birth. I know the Stars root and branch. If you want to talk of family affairs, you can talk to me almost as well as to the master himself, sir."

There was a suppressed anxiety in the old woman's face and manner that declared her expectant and solicitous to hear some especial tidings.

The earl hesitated. He was averse to speaking to this trusted old servant of her master's family affairs; but he, too, had heavy anxieties, and it seemed to him that he could not wait until he should be able to discover Mr. Star. He was not here to pry out secrets, but to ask a few questions which it would not be treason to her employer if old Margot should answer. While he deliberated, she exclaimed:

"You need not be afraid to speak to me, sir. I know my place, and I should not answer any questions I ought not to. The master knows that he may trust me as himself. I may say that I brought him up, and Miss Jenny—"

"Miss Jenny?" said the earl, huskily.

"The master's sister, sir. She died young. She is buried near London. She was a great beauty, sir, and

as innocent and pure as an angel—my poor lamb! My poor lamb!" said old Margot, her voice suddenly changing to a sort of low, wailing tone.

The earl was silent for a brief space, and his face was averted. Presently he said, very quietly:

"I am come here, my good woman, to ask Mr. Star a very simple question. Perhaps you can answer it. Who is the girl known as Beryl Star?"

Old Margot uttered a quick ejaculation, and came nearer to the visitor, her features working, her dull old eyes emitting an unwonted gleam.

"I was right!" she exclaimed. "You have come upon the same business that took the master away. Where is Miss Beryl? Where is she?"

"Answer my questions first. First of all tell me who is the gentleman who came from London and took Mr. Star away with him?"

"His name is Desmond, and he's married to Miss Beryl," said old Margot, flinging reticence to the winds under the belief that this stranger knew the entire story of Beryl's disappearance. "I heard him say that he had traced out the master, and believed Miss Beryl to belong to this family, and he took the master to London with him."

"It was Noble Desmond. He is searching for his lost wife everywhere, poor fellow. I saw her to-day—"

"To-day? You saw her? Then she is not dead? She has not killed herself? She was safe? Was she safe? Oh, sir, I am half mad with the trouble—"

"She was safe and well," said the earl, kindly. "She is earning her living with her needle."

"Safe and well! The good Lord be praised!" sobbed the old woman, in an uncontrollable joy. "Oh, sir, I never slept last night for thinking of her. The poor,

disowned lamb! She's had a hard life, sir, from her very birth. She was brought up in a school in Switzerland and never had a home. She never had any one to cuddle her up, as mothers do their children, to pet her, to love her. And when she came here a while ago, in the winter's cold, begging, as you might say, for a shelter and a kind word as you'd fling to a dog, the master pelted her with hard words as they were stones, and turned her out of the house, and she went out into the great world, sir, to earn her own bread, and she barely seventeen, and a stranger in England! And when Mr. Desmond found the master out, and came here and said that she was missing, the master turned white as a sheet. He thought as he had driven her to her death, as the world had proved too much for her, as she had worked and starved and gone voluntarily to her death."

The woman laughed and wept together. The earl was greatly moved by her agitation. Her words had smitten him as so many knife-thrusts.

"You love Miss Beryl very dearly," he said.

"Yes, I love her and I pity her. I love her because she has no one else to love her, because she has been misused all her life?"

"Was not Mr. Star kind to her?"

"Kind! He hated her. He would have been glad to have her die, although not by her own hand. That would have looked as if he had driven her to it."

"Why should he hate her? Had she ever harmed him?"

"Never, except in her coming into the world!"

The earl started.

"How did her birth wrong him?" he asked.

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"Is Beryl Star her real name?"

"It is the name the master gave her, sir. She had no right to any."

"Mrs. Beryl looked very pale and thin," he observed. "She has had a hard life, as you say. I do not wonder that Mr. Star feels burdened with remorse."

"Did you come to him with a message from her, sir."

"She did not send me, but I am come upon her account," replied the earl, evasively. "You need not be so reticent with me, my good woman. I presume any neighbors of yours could tell me all I want to know."

"No one in this neighborhood knows of the existence even of Miss Beryl."

"No one?" The earl was surprised. "Is she not an acknowledged member of the family?"

Old Margot shook her head.

"What relation does she bear to Mr. Star?"

"She is his niece."

An unguarded admission. Old Margot was angry at herself the moment she had made it.

Its effect upon the earl was most marked and singular. He uttered a strange, low cry and his form quivered as under a galvanic shock. He gasped for breath and fell back in his chair.

Old Margot ran to him in terror.

As she approached, he feebly waved her back, and said, hoarsely:

"I am not well, I think. Don't disturb yourself. I shall be myself presently. His niece! His niece, you said!"

He removed his hat and wiped his brows, which were wet with sweat. Old Margot watched him closely, with new and strange ideas forming in her mind.

There was a long silence.

"This girl Beryl is the daughter of Jenny Star. Poor girl! I must go back to London by the first

train. I must find her immediately. I can readily obtain her address. Oh! why did I not know? Why did I not guess?"

His voice was broken; his soul agitated to its depths.

"I don't remember having ever seen you before," said old Margot, "but I have my suspicions that you knew Miss Jenny. After she died there was a man came here to inquire after her. He seemed a lawyer sort of man. I think he had been sent here by Miss Jenny's lover, and the master thought so, too. The master told him that Miss Jenny was dead, and told him where she was buried. But the master did not tell him that Miss Jenny left a child? How could he? I think you have heard the whole story from Miss Beryl. I cannot think that you would make a mock of the good name of this family. The master has been hard and cruel, but no one knows what he has suffered. He loved Miss Jenny with a love that was real worship. She was his pride, his idol. He found her in a London lodging-house alone. She gave birth to this child, Miss Beryl, and died. There was no wedding-ring upon her finger; no husband beside her to cheer her last moments. She never even said that she was married. But I know that she was pure and good till the last. And—" Old Margot's eyes gleamed, and she raised her hand high above her head—"may God's bitterest curse light upon the husband who deserted her! May his nights be sleepless, his days full of bitterness. May he be balked in all his hopes and desires!"

"All this and more have come to him," said the earl, with a groan. "He who caused her death has been punished. She is avenged."

He put on his hat and strode to the door, feeling

blindly for the latch. Old Margot would have detained him further, but he hastened on to the outer door and gave himself egress. The cabman was asleep on the box. Lord Hawkhurst roused him up and entered the cab, and the vehicle rolled out of the Starwood grounds, and old Margot stood in the doorway gazing after it, a pale light behind her outlining her form.

CHAPTER XLII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

On leaving Hawkhurst House, Beryl returned to her lodgings in Bayswater, and did not emerge from her room again that day.

Her work was finished on the morning of the fourth day, and it became necessary to dispose of it. There was no use in working elaborate pieces of embroidery unless a market could be obtained for them. Beryl shrank from going from shop to shop, as she had done before, but there was no help for it. She put on her black garments, her hat and short black *crepe* veil, which effectually shrouded her features, and, work in hand, set forth upon her mission. She shrank from going into the neighborhood of Oxford and Regent streets, but that was the fashionable quarter; it was there that wealthy ladies went to purchase costly wares, and it was there she would stand most chance to sell her embroideries. She wandered into Piccadilly, and into the Burlington Arcade.

She soon came out of the Arcade considerably disheartened, and brushed against her old friend Mrs. Margle.

In spite of Beryl's black veil, Mrs. Margle knew her. She stood a moment as if stupefied, but as Beryl essayed to pass on, the lodging-house keeper clutched at her garments, crying out:

"Oh, Miss Star, wherever have you been all this time, and your husband wild about you? My dear, oh, my dear—"

Curious eyes were upon them. Beryl came to a halt lest she should create a scene.

"How do you do, Mrs. Margle?" she said, quietly. "Come out into the street with me, if you wish to speak to me."

Mrs. Margle kept a close hold upon the girl, but went with her into the open street.

"I knew you at once," said Mrs. Margle, garrulously, "in spite of your black dress and that thick veil. I knew you by the way you carried your head, by your figure, your walk, and by your whole self, and I was that took aback I can hardly get my breath yet. Oh, Mrs. Star—I mean Mrs. Desmond—wherever have you been?"

"I have been quite safe, Mrs. Margle, and very well in health. How is—is Mr. Desmond?"

Her voice faltered as she made the inquiry.

"He is not well. How could he be? He neither eats nor sleeps, as one might say," said Mrs. Margle, reproachfully. "He spends all his time in searching for you. I believe he thinks that you may destroy yourself. He has grown thin and nervous, and starts at every sound. He thinks that he saw you in Wells street the other night, and no one can persuade him to the contrary. He spends all his evenings at home now a-watching for you. Oh, Mrs. Desmond, you've treated

him cruel! What has made all this trouble? Why did you run away from Mr. Desmond on your wedding-day? Were you out of your mind at the time? I have thought that you might have had a sudden attack of dementia."

"No; it was not that. I did not know it at the time, but I was not free to marry Mr. Desmond. I discovered that I had made a frightful mistake, and I knew no way to rectify it except to go away. I am sorry for Mr. Desmond, but I am not his wife, and I can never see him again."

"Never?"

"Never!" said Beryl, firmly. "He is free. In time he may marry some one whom he will love. I pray that God will pardon me for the blight I have brought upon his life, and make him forget me."

"My dear," said Mrs. Margle, "this is all nonsense. You have got some curious notion in your head, but Mr. Desmond will reason it all out of you in no time. You have treated him cruel in running off from him as you have, but he'll never throw it up to you if you'll go back to him. If you think that your marriage to him is all wrong, why not reason the matter over with him? He is a well-principled, honorable young gentleman, and won't let his feelings influence his convictions. Don't set up your opinion against that of the rest of the world, but take advice; counsel with Mr. Desmond and that lawyer that comes so often to see him."

"I know I am right, Mrs. Margle, and I could not bear the pain of seeing Mr. Desmond. I am nothing to him now. You don't know, Mrs. Margle; you can never know—"

"I know one thing," said the woman, as Beryl paused, "and that is that I am going to take you back to your

husband if I have to hire a policeman to help me. You are not in your right mind, Mrs. Desmond ; and whether you are or not, your husband is your best protector."

She clutched Beryl yet more closely, and looked up and down the street for an empty cab. They were in Regent street now, in the midst of the throng of the promenaders, and did not attract any special attention as they walked on with the crowd.

Suddenly Mrs. Margle came to an abrupt halt, uttering an exclamation of astonishment.

"What is it?" asked Beryl.

"Look—in the carriage yonder!" cried Mrs. Margle. "Do you see that man with the red hair and beard? Look, quick! You see him?"

"Yes, yes," said Beryl, shrinking back ; "I see him."

"What a fate that I should have seen him to-day, and for the first time in seventeen years!" cried Mrs. Margle, relaxing her hold of Beryl in her excitement. "When did he get back to England? I can hardly believe the evidence of my senses! Mrs. Desmond, that man is Colonel Gray, your own father!"

Beryl looked after the luxurious carriage as if spell-bound.

The man whom Mrs. Margle had pointed out to her as Colonel Gray and her own father was Lord Hawkhurst.

Beryl did not know him as the earl, but she recognized him as the gentleman she had seen at Hawkhurst House.

"That man my father!" she ejaculated.

"Yes, miss ; your own father. I know him by his red hair, his big features, and his red, bristling beard. He has grown older, but he has not greatly changed. Those fair men do not show age as dark men do. It don't seem

possible, but your father has turned up at last. That is he; I'll swear to him."

She continued to gaze after the receding carriage, as in a trance. But when it had vanished beyond her sight, she bethought herself, with a start, of her prisoner.

Turning hastily, she found that Beryl had taken advantage of her pre-occupation, and was gone.

Mrs. Margle began a wild search for her, but Beryl had utterly disappeared, and the lodging-house keeper was forced to continue her way to Wells street alone, but with her marvelous story of adventure at her tongue's end.

It had happened that an omnibus had drawn up at the curbstone to admit a lady who had signaled it. Beryl, seeing her opportunity, had also entered it, and was some rods away before Mrs. Margle had discovered that she had vanished.

Beryl returned to Bayswater without further adventure.

She had scarcely removed her outer garments and seated herself by the fire to think over the fateful discovery of her father, when Miss Cavanagh knocked at her door and entered the room. The landlady looked angry, suspicious and determined.

"Excuse my intrusion, Miss Star," she said, "but I came up to bring a note which a gentleman left here during your absence. He is your cousin, Kate says."

Beryl's face flushed all over, but she took the note which Miss Cavanagh extended to her. It was sealed.

"The gentleman called to see you, and seemed concerned because you were not in," continued Miss Cavanagh. "So he wrote that note, sealed it and left it."

Beryl tore open the envelope. The letter contained but few words, and they were as follows :

"BERYL : I must see you on important business. Shall call again to-morrow evening at half-past nine o'clock. DANE."

Beryl crumpled the letter in her hand and thrust it into her pocket.

"Of course your business is your business and not mine, Miss Star," said Miss Cavanagh, "and I'm not wanting to pry into your affairs, but I mnst speak my mind, that's all. The gentleman was handsome enough, but there was that in his face I did not like, although he understands blarney well enough, I'll say that for him. I wish to ask if he told Kate the truth. Is he your cousin ?"

Beryl hesitated. She would not lie, and she could hardly confess so much of the truth without confessing the whole.

"Your silence is sufficient answer," said Miss Cavanagh. "He is not your cousin. You told me that you were poor and friendless. I took you in out of pity and kindness, and how am I rewarded ? You told me that you came from school at Vevay, and must earn your own living. Sure, I thought it was next to an angel you were. But one day when I was out, comes this young man to see you as bold as brass. Does that look like friendlessness ? And you told me never a word of your 'cousin.' It's mighty careful you've been not to mention his name to me since. And one evening you went out and returned home very late in a cab, and you never gave me an explanation of that either. Why should girls of your age receive gentlemen visitors and

go out at evening alone? It's sore wounded and troubled I am. I feel that I have been cheated and deceived. It's not of myself I'm thinking, nor of my house. You will go away and never mind me at all; but I shall think often and often of the girl I liked and took into my house, but who turned out badly. Oh, Miss Star, why are you not as innocent and good as you seem?"

The warm-hearted Irish woman choked a little, and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Are you really my friend, Miss Cavanagh?" asked Beryl.

"I am; indeed, and I am. And if you'll say to me now that it's all right, I'll believe in you still," said the landlady. "I came to tell you that I must have your room, but sure you can give me an explanation. When I look into your face I cannot believe evil of you."

"I am worthy of your esteem, Miss Cavanagh," said Beryl, gravely. "I need a friend. I should like to confide in you, and believe you will never betray my confidence."

"Never. If I find—but of course, you are worthy of my recommendation, Miss Star; I can get some sort of situation for you, perhaps," said Miss Cavanagh, brightening. "I thought of you to-day when I was at Hawkhurst House—an earl's house, my dear—in Park Lane—"

"Hawkhurst House?"

"Yes. It's a perfect palace, and that grand that you'd think the people must be happy there as in Paradise. My cousin is lady-housekeeper there. She was a McGinnis of County Clare, and married a Dominick. She is a widow, is Mrs. Dominick, and quite the grand lady with her big gold chains. She treated

me to tea out of real china cups as thin as paper, and India sweetmeats, and such delicacies as earls live on. But this earl is not happy, by reason that his health is failing him quite suddenly. He's a big, bold-looking gentleman, with a flaming red beard, and has a temper to match. His far-away cousin and heir lives with him, but I didn't see him. Mrs. Dominick says that the young gentleman is very handsome and good."

"The earl has red hair?" said Beryl, as Miss Cavanagh paused from sheer breathlessness.

"As red as live flames, Miss Star. He looks like a sort of human lion. But he's ill now, though, to be sure, he won't hear the word, and he would ride out to-day, and he roars out at the idea of seeing a doctor. He needs some one to wait upon him, and read to him, and copy his manuscripts, and write his letters, and he won't let his heir nor his heir's wife do it for him. He told Mrs. Dominick to find him some honest, well-bred gentlewoman to come in for a few days to serve as nurse and amanuensis, and if you were not too young, now, I should say this was the very place for you. It would lead to employment elsewhere."

"Oh, Miss Cavanagh," cried Beryl, excitedly, "it is the place for me! I must go there! I must!"

"But you are too young," said the landlady, drawing back in surprise.

"I can disguise myself to appear older. All the secrets of my life are centering about that house. Hear me, and help me. I can wear a black wig, and darken my face, and wear spectacles, and no one there would know me, not even the earl's heir. Listen!"

In a quick, impassioned voice, every word ringing with truth and honesty, Beryl poured forth her own and her mother's story. She knew that she could trust Miss

Cavanagh, and she held nothing back, telling of her birth, her education, her first and second marriages, and all the more recent events, including her discovery of her father that day. Miss Cavanagh interrupted her now and then, put a question or two, but believed the story implicitly from first to last.

"I have only one object in life now," said Beryl, in conclusion, "and that is to clear, if possible, my mother's name. I should like to know my father, myself unknown to him. Help me, Miss Cavanagh. I have the courage to meet Dane Conyers day after day and not betray my relationship to him. Help me to some disguise. Procure for me this situation, and I will bless you all my days."

CHAPTER XLIII.

IN THE STRONGHOLD OF HER ENEMIES.

Miss Cavanagh, having approved Beryl's bold project of seeking a situation in the very stronghold of the girl's enemies, proceeded with vigor and enthusiasm to assist in its accomplishment. That afternoon the warm-hearted Irish woman went out upon a shopping expedition, and procured at a furnishing-shop for theatre-players the chief essentials for Beryl's necessary disguise. She also pnr-chased, at a ladies' outfitting establishment, widow's caps, some neck ruffles, a widow's bonnet and long veil, and a black bombazine gown. The latter required certain alterations, which she assisted Beryl to make that evening.

Upon the following morning, Beryl made her toilet with Miss Cavanagh's assistance. A wash, in use among actors and actresses, transformed her from the fairest of blondes into a brunette. Her eyebrows were skillfully darkened. Her hair was fortunately very short, and a black wig was fitted smoothly to her head and coiled into a twist behind. A pair of gold-bowed spectacles; a long, straight, bombazine gown, a close-fitting widow's cap; a high neck-ruffle and deep frills at her wrists, with judicious padding about the figure, completely transformed the fair, slim girl into a seemingly elderly gentlewoman.

"No one who had known you as Miss Star would know you now," said Miss Cavanagh, in admiration of her own ingenuity and skill. "You look like a curate's widow; you do, indeed. But what shall you call yourself? You will need a new name, you know, in your new character."

"You must give me a name, Miss Cavanagh," said Beryl.

"It must be respectable. There's everything in a name, sure, though Shakespeare didn't think so. And the name should not be odd, so that it would attract attention. I have it. You shall be Mrs. Jane Park. That's simple and sounds honest."

"I like the name. Jane was my mother's name," said Beryl, softly.

The girl put on her widow's bonnet and veil, a large black shawl, black gloves, and took up an Astrachan muff and declared herself ready. There was nothing in her appearance to suggest disguise. She looked, in this dress, as in her usual garb, the true and perfect lady.

"Come down to my drawing-room, Miss Star," said

Miss Cavanagh—"I mean Mrs. Park. Sure I must get used to the name, or I shall spoil it all. I'll put on my own bonnet, and we'll go directly to Hawkhurst House."

They descended the stairs to the drawing-room, but had scarcely entered the apartment when there came a loud and peremptory ring at the garden-bell. Beryl looked out of the window as Kate hurried out with the key of the garden-door in her hand.

"I fear you are going to have a call, Miss Cavanagh," said Beryl. "I can see three gentlemen outside—"

"It's the parish rates, perhaps," said Miss Cavanagh. "I may have to see them, worse luck, but they can't detain us long. Trust the parish officers for coming promptly."

But they were not the parish officers to whom Kate gave admittance. Beryl drew back in the shadow of the curtain, recognizing the visitors. They were Noble Desmond, Mr. Sherwald and William Star of Starwood. Beryl retreated toward her landlady, with a countenance of dismay, explaining breathlessly who were the intruders.

"They are coming in!" cried Miss Cavanagh. "Was there ever such a stupid as Kate? Old Connaught has not the like of her. She's confessed you live here and that you're at home. Step into my room, Miss Star, honey, and I'll speak to them."

Beryl passed into the adjoining room, and not an instant too soon. Honest Kate was marshaling the gentlemen up the stair. She ushered them into the drawing-room, declaring that she would summon Miss Star, and went blundering up to Beryl's room.

Miss Cavanagh emerged from the shadow in which

she had stood a moment unseen, and greeted the gentlemen with smiling courtesy.

"Is it the parish officers you are, sirs?" she asked, with a spice of her saucy Irish brogue. "Well, it's prompt you are, anyhow. The grass don't grow under your feet while you are collecting the rates, I'll swear to that."

"We are not the parish officers, madam," said Mr. Sherwald. "We—"

"You are the water rates? Well, there's not much difference. It's money you're wanting all the same. There's never an end at all to the outgo of money. It's one thing and another by day and by night, and no peace at all with it all. How much are you wanting this time?" asked Miss Cavanagh, in a tone of exasperation.

"I tell you, madam, that you are mistaken," said Mr. Sherwald, impatiently. "We are not officers of any kind. We are come here to call upon your lodger, Miss Star. The servant has gone up to summon the young lady."

"We are her friends," said Noble Desmond. "It may be that she will not come down to us. In that case, we desire to be permitted to go up to her room."

"The young lady is my niece," said Mr. Star, stiffly and somewhat reluctantly. "My relationship to her gives me a right to intrude upon her, whatever her objections."

At this juncture, Kate reappeared, with a very blank visage.

"Miss Star is not in her room," she announced. "And I can't find her hat and sacque, and she must have gone out, though it was not I let her out. She went out of one of the neighbor's gates. I mind them

Thompsons had their gate open an hour this morning, and they are next neighbors. Miss Star must have gone out to try to sell them embroideries, poor soul!"

"Are you sure she's not in her room?" demanded Desmond, his countenance changing. "She might have seen us enter—"

"And be hiding, d'ye mean? Oh! no, sir. She's a born lady, and 'd scorn to do the like of that. She's gone out," affirmed Kate, "and if your business is pressin', and you'd like to see her, why, you must come again when she's at home."

It was plain that Kate believed Miss Star to have gone out. Miss Cavanagh's Irish face was quietly impassive. One would not deem her cognizant of Beryl's whereabouts. The gentlemen were forced to accept the situation.

"Have you any idea when Miss Star will be in, madam?" asked Mr. Sherwald, addressing the landlady.

"Sure and how should I?" she replied. "I didn't even know that she was out. If you are her friends, you can call again. You might call this evening," she added, artfully. "She's always in in the evenings."

"We will come again this evening," said Desmond, gravely. "Be sure to tell her, madam, that we are her friends, and that it is of the utmost importance that we should see her. Stay, I will leave a note for her."

He drew out his note-book and a pencil, and wrote the following words upon a loose scrap of paper:

"BERYL, MY OWN WIFE: A friend of mine, Mr. Sherwald, discovered your place of refuge yesterday by following Conyers, whom he suspected of knowing it. Your uncle is with Mr. Sherwald and me as I write these hasty lines. Mr. Star repents his cruelty to you, and

will take you home to Starwood, provided that you persist in keeping away from me. My poor little wife, I want to take care of you, to cherish you, to reason away this vagary of yours that Conroy lives. There is no doubt that he is dead. Only give me a few minutes' speech with you, my darling.

"YOUR LOVER AND HUSBAND."

Desmond folded the scrap of paper and inclosed it in an unused envelope which was also in his note-book. He hesitated an instant upon the address, then wrote the name, "Miss Star."

"Will you give that to her, madam, upon her return?" he asked, placing the missive in Miss Cavanagh's hands.

The landlady replied in the affirmative. Desmond knew that she could be trusted to keep her word, and proposed to his friends a departure. They went out with evident reluctance, and Kate gave them egress at the garden-door.

When they were fairly in the street, Sherwald said, in a tone expressive of dissatisfaction:

"That servant thought that Miss Star was out, but she was not. That Irish woman was hiding the young lady, take my word for it."

"I am of your opinion, Sherwald," said Desmond, "but the landlady will give Mrs. Desmond my note, and when we go back she will receive us."

"Let us wait on the street-corner and give her time to read the letter," said Mr. Star. "In the course of twenty minutes we'll go back again."

This proposition met with approval. The three gentlemen came to a halt upon the street-corner and waited.

In the meantime, Miss Cavanagh had carried Desmond's letter into the inner room where Beryl waited. She found the girl with her head buried in the cushions of a couch, her form trembling as if the voice of Desmond had stirred her being to its center.

"Mr. Desmond left a note for you, Miss Star," she said, gently. "Did you hear all that was said?"

Beryl reached out her hand for the note, bowing her head.

"Mr. Desmond is very handsome, but he looks as if he had suffered terribly," said Miss Cavanagh. "It's a hard fate that's parted you two, but you have done right, my dear. You couldn't have done otherwise that I can see."

She withdrew to send Kate out for a cab and to put on her bonnet, leaving Beryl alone. When she returned, a few minutes later, she found her lodger in the drawing-room, quite calm and composed. Beryl had learned self-control in a stern school, and she was one to hide her sorrows.

"The cab is coming, my dear," said Miss Cavanagh. "And Kate says that the gentlemen who called to see you are standing at the street-corner, as if they were watching. They do not believe you are gone out, and will be back again presently. We must hasten or they will intercept us."

They hastened down-stairs, and reached the gate as the four-wheeled cab drove up. Beryl entered the vehicle first, Miss Cavanagh followed, and they drove away as Desmond and his companions hastily returned. The gentlemen saw the lady in black as she passed out to the cab, and all were positive in their belief that she was no other than Beryl; but the vehicle rolled rapidly

away in an opposite direction, and they had no opportunity to even address her.

On arriving at Hawkhurst House, in Park Lane, they were shown into the housekeeper's room and into the presence of its owner.

Mrs. Dominick received "Mrs. Park" with great politeness, and showed her especial attention. As the acquaintance progressed, and inquiries into "Mrs. Park's" antecedents seemed imminent, Miss Cavanagh adroitly remarked:

"You were telling me yesterday, Mrs. Dominick, that Lord Hawkhurst was ill and wanting some one to wait upon him, and I have made bold to bring my friend, Mrs. Park, to apply for the situation. I'll answer for her, and you know that my word is good as gold. If a curate's widow—a respectable, refined gentlewoman—would suit his lordship, Mrs. Park would suit him."

"He does not want a nurse," said the housekeeper. "His valet nurses him, and only this morning his lordship flung a book at the valet's head for some clumsiness. He wants some one to write his letters at his dictation, to read to him, to amuse him, and he wants a lady to do these offices for him. He says that a gentleman is out of place in a sick-room. Mrs. Conyers read to him yesterday and wrote out his letters, but when she went out he gave a kind of groan and put the letters on the fire. He did not know that I saw him do it, but I knew the reason. The handwriting was fine and spidery, and could hardly be made out. And her reading was affected and unpleasing. My lord begged me to find some one to-day to come for a week or two, and I have already taken two ladies—friends of mine, for whom I sent—in to him at different times, but his lordship is very particular, and neither of them suited. One

was affected in her speech. The other had a strong Scottish accent. So you see, Mrs. Park, that it depends entirely upon his caprice whether he engages you or not. If you can bear his temper, and he should be pleased with you, he will pay you liberally."

"Is gastric fever a dangerous disease?" asked Beryl.

"As in all fevers, people die of it, but I don't think my lord will die. He is a very giant for strength. His illness is to me most mysterious. He is temperate in his living and all his habits. People seem to have the impression that he is very ill. They were leaving cards all day yesterday, even when he was out. The medical man said this morning that his lordship is not to see many visitors. I notice that people are paying court to Mr. and Mrs. Conyers assiduously now. Mr. Conyers is Lord Hawkhurst's heir," the housekeeper added, for Beryl's benefit.

"And if Lord Hawkhurst dies Mr. Conyers will be the next earl, will he not?" asked Beryl.

"Yes. Mr. Conyers is a distant relative, but the nearest in order of succession to the title. The property is not like most noblemen's estates; it is not entailed, and if my lord were to die without a will it would be divided equally between Mr. Conyers and Mr. Desmond, who have equal claims."

Beryl started.

"Mr. Desmond?" said Miss Cavanagh. "Who is he?"

"A young kinsman of my lord. He is Noble Desmond, a young barrister."

"Ah!" muttered Miss Cavanagh. "She's in the very nest of 'em, sure. The earl and Conyers and Desmond are all one tribe, anyhow, and that's curious."

"I didn't understand," said Mrs. Dominick. "Were

you asking further about young Mr. Desmond? Don't you know the family history? The family name of the earls of Hawkhurst is Desmond. When my lord was a young man and before he came into the title, he was Lord Gray Desmond."

"*Gray!*" murmured Beryl. "Was he ever a colonel in the army?"

"No; his father was earl, and he was the heir. He had no need of any profession," said Mrs. Dominick. "Mr. Conyers's father was a Desmond, but changed his name to Conyers on marrying an heiress of that name. My lord is a widower and childless, Mrs. Park, but he's young still, being not over fifty years of age. Mr. Conyers will inherit everything at my lord's death, except a trifling annuity to Mr. Desmond, I suppose."

At this moment, a bell rang sharply close at hand.

"My lord's bell," said Mrs. Dominick, rising. "He is calling for me. He is in the library. Come with me, Mrs. Park, and I will present you to his lordship. Bridget Cavanagh, just wait until I come back to you. Keep up your courage, Mrs. Park; don't get frightened; there's no knowing but that his lordship may engage you. I'll give you a warm recommendation, for my cousin's sake. Come!"

She led the way into the hall and up-stairs to Lord Hawkhurst's library.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DESTROYER AND THE HEALER.

The earl was alone. The wintry light streamed into the great library, which was bright, warm and luxurious. Upon a writing-desk lay a half-finished letter, the ink not yet dry. Lord Hawkhurst had been writing, but had been arrested in his task by a sudden spasm of weakness that had sent him staggering to his couch.

Mrs. Dominick came into the room, followed by Beryl.

"Are you worse, my Lord?" asked the housekeeper, approaching him. "Shall I send for the doctor? Shall I call Mrs. Conyers?"

"No, no," gasped the earl. "I shall be all right directly. It's the cursed medicine—I burn alive every time I take it. The infernal doctor—"

He paused, growing ghastly pale.

Beryl's quick eyes detected a carafe of iced water on the table. She poured some of the liquid in a goblet and brought it to the earl, placing it to his lips. He drank it unhesitatingly, revived, and stared at her with returning strength.

"My Lord," said Mrs. Dominick, "this is Mrs. Park, a curate's widow, who may be able to please you and attend upon you for a week or so till your Lordship gets out again. I can recommend her in the very highest terms."

Beryl retreated a little. The earl sat up and looked at her keenly.

"Copy that portion of a letter on my desk, Mrs. Park," he said.

Beryl obeyed. The handwriting, clear and distinct, appeared to please him, for he uttered an approving "Humph."

"Let me hear you read," commanded the earl.

Beryl took up a volume of history upon the table, and read a paragraph.

"Humph!" said the earl again. "You'll do. You can stay, madam. I suppose you can do what you are told to do. I am not so well as I thought. I want you to give me my medicines henceforth, and to be at hand when I want you. You can take off your bonnet and finish reading that chapter aloud which you began."

"I'll take your bonnet to my room, Mrs. Park," said Mrs. Dominick, well pleased that Beryl's services had been accepted and herself consequently relieved of many additional cares that had pressed sorely upon her. "By and by I'll show you up to your room. Shall I take any word to Miss Cavanagh?"

"No," said Beryl, removing her hat, veil and shawl. "I have no word to send except that I am grateful to her and to you."

Mrs. Dominick went away with Beryl's outer garments, and the girl took her seat at a convenient distance from the earl and read aloud to him as he had requested.

Her voice, low and sweet, clear and distinct, thrilled him like music heard long ago. He watched her in a species of fascination, as she read through her spectacles, the glass of which was ordinary window-glass, nothing more. There were tears in his frosty blue eyes as he

listened, and he wiped them away furtively. Her voice reminded him keenly of a voice that had long ago been hushed in death.

In the pause between the paragraphs Beryl now and then stole a glance at him. She believed him to be her own father. She had come here in disguise, hating him with a bitter, furious hatred, as one who had wronged her mother and driven that mother to her death. But she could not look upon him and hate him still. His massive head, his grand figure, his rough-hewn features, his look of conscious power, were all full of a subtle magnetism that drew her liking in spite of herself. She could not wonder that poor Jenny Star had abandoned her kindred for his sake. She felt that she could love him, and struggled against the outgoing warmth and tenderness of her heart as if it had been a crime to love him, as if love for him implied disrespect to the memory of her dead mother. She felt an impulse to go to him, to kneel down beside his couch, to call him father and implore his love and protection ; but she scorned herself for the impulse, and told herself that she must be going mad.

She finished reading and lapsed into silence.

"I have to take my medicine every two hours," said Lord Hawkhurst. "Is it two o'clock ?"

Beryl looked toward the mantel-piece. The little ormolu clock was on the stroke of two.

"It is two o'clock," she said, and the silvery chimes corroborated her assertion.

"The medicines are on the cabinet yonder," said Lord Hawkhurst. "The tall phial with the double label contains my medicine. You can pour it into the goblet beside it."

Beryl went to the cabinet. The phial indicated con-

tained a clear, colorless liquid like water, destitute of sediment.

"One teaspoonful," said the earl.

The teaspoon lay on a tiny silver tray at hand. Beryl was about to take it up when the door opened and Octavia entered the room.

Beryl's hand trembled so that the spoon rattled against the glass, and she averted her face instinctively.

Octavia, dressed in an elaborately embroidered dark-blue cashmere costume, had nearly crossed the floor before she detected Beryl's presence. Then she stopped short, with a look of surprise on her dark, unlovely face.

"It is actually two o'clock!" she observed, in a high, affected voice. "After all, I am prompt, Lord Hawkhurst. I am in time to give you your medicine."

The earl frowned. Her voice grated harshly upon his ears.

"Mrs. Conyers," he said, quietly, "this lady is my attendant, Mrs. Park. Mrs. Park, let me present you to Mrs. Conyers."

Octavia bowed superciliously. That she was not a lady in grain as in outward appearance was apparent in her treatment of one she believed to be her social inferior.

"Oh! a nurse," she said, looking at Beryl insolently. "Why did you not send for me, my Lord, to negotiate with this person? Dominick is well enough in her place, but she is not competent to select a nurse for you."

"I engaged her myself, Octavia," said the earl. "Mrs. Park is a lady, and I desire her to be treated with respect."

Octavia flashed a look of dislike at Beryl. She could not penetrate the girl's disguise, but she disliked the new-comer instinctively.

"So long as Mrs. Park conducts herself properly, she will be treated with respect," said Octavia, carelessly. "These medicines are very powerful, and the doctor has enjoined the utmost care in dealing them out. It is a task that should not be intrusted to a stranger. I have measured out all his lordship's medicines heretofore, and shall continue to do so, although you may administer them."

"I think I need not trouble you further, Octavia," said the earl. "Mrs. Park can measure out the medicines as exactly as you."

Octavia's features worked in seeming grief. She looked sorely wounded and hurt.

"Oh," said she, "may I not feel that in one thing at least I am indispensable to you? Is there not one thing I can do better for you than any one else, my Lord? I love you as if you were my own father—"

"I beg your pardon, Octavia," said the earl, as her voice broke down, and she put her handkerchief to her eyes. "You can measure my medicines, if doing so gives you any pleasure. I am glad you are so fond of me and solicitous of my welfare, I am sure."

Mrs. Conyers recovered her equanimity very rapidly.

"Be good enough to bring the water, Mrs. Park," she said. "It is necessary to dilute the medicine."

CHAPTER XLV.

IN THE SICK-ROOM.

The earl lay back and closed his eyes. Beryl hastened to bring the carafe of water. Her movements were so expeditious that she was in time to see Octavia slip a tiny phial back in her pocket, a phial which Beryl had not before seen, and which had no counterpart on the cabinet.

A horrible suspicion came into the girl's mind.

She rejected it on the instant. It seemed too monstrous for belief. She knew as well as if she had seen the act, that Octavia had dropped into the medicine destined for the earl, some portion from the mysterious little phial now in Mrs. Conyers's pocket, and yet she dared not acknowledge her conviction even to herself in that moment of horror and bewilderment.

"Give him that," said Octavia, ostentatiously dropping a spoonful of water into the mixture.

Beryl hesitated. Then, telling herself that she was foolish, and that her suspicions were unfounded, and a shame to the mind that had conceived them, she crossed the room with the goblet and placed it in Lord Hawkhurst's hands.

He drained the glass at a draught.

"I do hope the medicine will do you good, my Lord," said Octavia, sympathetically, approaching the earl. "You were looking most miserable when I entered the

room. I pray that you will not have another of those dreadful paroxysms to-night."

The earl did not answer.

Octavia remained in the library only a few minutes longer, going away to her own room.

She had scarcely departed, when a terrible paroxysm of pain seized upon the earl, and he groaned in his utter anguish. The cold sweat poured off his distorted features. Beryl brought him cold water to allay the burning sensation in his stomach, and placed *sal volatile* at his nostrils, and wiped his face with a soft handkerchief, and held his hands in her own. His unconscious grip upon her hands was like the pressure of iron clamps, but she made no outcry nor complaint.

The spasm of pain and weakness was not prolonged. The earl began to revive after a little and be himself again.

"That is the worst attack I have had," he said feebly. "I think each attack is worse than those that preceded."

He looked at Beryl's red and bruised hands, and stammered out an apology.

"You must think me a perfect bear, Mrs. Park," he exclaimed. "I beg your pardon. You are a brave woman. Why did you not run for help, or set up a screaming?"

"You needed me to wait upon you," replied Beryl, with a faint smile, the first he had seen on her lips. "I couldn't be spared to indulge in hysterics. Do you really think, sir, that every paroxysm is worse than the one before it?"

"I do. I think my disease is becoming serious, but that pig-headed doctor does not understand my case at all. His medicines do not agree with me. I am constantly growing worse."

"I think you will begin to mend now," said Beryl. "I am sure you will be restored to health in a week."

She spoke with such confidence and assurance that Lord Hawkhurst was cheered and encouraged, in spite of his gloomy forebodings.

A few minutes later, Lord Hawkhurst's valet came in, bearing a small silver tray laden with delicacies. Beryl excused herself and descended to the housekeeper's room.

Miss Cavanagh was gone. Mrs. Dominick had prepared a tempting luncheon for "Mrs. Park," and was about to go up to the library for her when Beryl appeared. The two lunched together. Beryl said nothing of what she had seen, or what she suspected, but made herself so agreeable that Mrs. Dominick was charmed with her. After the luncheon, the housekeeper conducted the girl to the room she was to occupy.

It was on an upper floor, but not in the topmost story, where the servants were lodged. It was a large, pleasant chamber, well furnished.

"I will have a fire made before you come up this evening, Mrs. Park," said the good housekeeper. "If you want anything at any time, let me know. One of the housemaids has orders to wait upon you. You can lie down in my room when you feel tired during the day, instead of coming clear up here."

Beryl expressed her thanks, gave a glance at her reflection in the mirror, and the two descended again to the housekeeper's room.

"My lord will ring for you when he wants you," said Mrs. Dominick. "Sit down by the fire, Mrs. Park, and make yourself comfortable. It's but little past three now."

Beryl had a delicious little season of bodily rest, but her brain was more than usually active.

Mrs. Dominick would have liked to talk with the little supposed widow about her deceased "curate," and compared notes in regard to the length of their respective states of widowhood, but Miss Cavanagh had warned her cousin that "Mrs. Park" could not bear any allusion to her private affairs, and she wisely refrained.

Beryl asked for a goblet like that in the library, and obtained it readily, without exciting suspicion.

At about half-past three, the earl's bell rang.

"That's for you, Mrs. Park," said the housekeeper.

Beryl obeyed the summons, taking the green glass goblet with her.

She found Lord Hawkhurst alone and very restless, walking the floor.

"I want you to answer some letters for me," he said. "The physician has been here, but I would not have you summoned. I knew how tired you must be. He has not changed the medicines, and he thinks I am doing as well as he could have expected."

Beryl wrote the required letters from his lordship's dictation. He approved her penmanship, and the letters were sealed with red wax and sent out to be posted.

They were hardly disposed of when Mrs. Conyers again made her appearance.

"It is four o'clock, and I am as punctual as time itself," she said, lightly. "I am come to give you the medicine, my Lord. By the way, Mrs. Park, you were not at your post when the doctor was here. He was obliged to leave his directions with me. Bring me the carafe of water, please."

Beryl brought the carafe.

Mrs. Conyers busied herself in measuring out the medicine as before. Beryl saw no secret phial upon this occasion, but none the less she knew that its contents had been employed.

"Put in about a teaspoonful of water," said Mrs. Conyers, moving away from the cabinet, with the evident intention of compelling "Mrs. Park" to bear the reputation of mixing the medicine. "Be very particular. I think, dear Lord Hawkhurst, that you are looking better this evening. Rollyn is greatly distressed about you, and is coming in to see you. Poor Rollyn! He has grown to love you with a filial affection."

Octavia's back was turned to the new attendant. Beryl poured a sufficient quantity of water in the goblet she had brought to the library, concealing that in which was the medicine within a nook of the cabinet, and brought the clear and harmless liquid to the earl. He drank it as he had drunk the medicine, and did not remark upon the difference in taste from his usual draught.

"Shall I read to you, my Lord?" asked Octavia sweetly.

"No," he answered. "I am tired. Leave me alone."

Octavia obeyed the injunction and retired.

The shadows of the early winter twilight were filling the library, the long red lances of firelight alone relieved the gloom. The earl lay back on his couch silent, and Beryl was sitting in the shadows, when Dane Conyers finally came in. He did not see Beryl's dusky figure, but she knew his step and shrank back farther into the depths of her easy-chair.

"Are you here, my Lord?" asked Conyers, peering about him. "Why is there no light?"

"Yes, I am here," said the earl. "You've wakened me up out of a sound sleep, the most refreshing sleep I've had for a week. I wish you'd not come in here till I send for you."

"But is no one with you?"

"Mrs. Park is here," said the earl. "At least, she was when I dropped off to sleep."

"And are you no better to-night, sir?" asked Conyers, anxiously.

"You speak as if you expected to find me worse. I've had a bad day. Let me rest. I'll see you in the morning, Conyers. Go, now."

Conyers went out as softly as possible.

The earl arose from his couch and crossed the floor several times, his face more cheerful than the girl had yet seen it.

"I feel better," he announced. "I believe I am going to get well, after all. I'll have my valet in to stay with me awhile, so go and rest, Mrs. Park. I'll call you when I want you."

"Yes, my Lord," said Beryl, rising. "But will you promise to summon me before it is time to take more medicine? Will you promise to take no medicine from any hand but mine?"

The earl stared a little, but gave the required promise. Beryl arranged the two green glass goblets to her satisfaction, keeping one hidden within the open cabinet, and having rung for the valet and awaited his appearance, again retired to the housekeeper's room.

"He is better," she thought. "My suspicions of that woman are confirmed. If I had not come she would have destroyed his life. What will she do next, when she discovers that I have balked her? I will wait and see."

CHAPTER XLVI.

A REVEALING OF TRUTH.

It was the morning succeeding Beryl's advent at Hawkhurst House. The earl reclined in a Turkish lounging-chair before the fire in his library. He was fully dressed, as he had been every day throughout his singular illness. His malady had left its traces upon him, but he felt stronger, better and more cheerful on this morning than he had felt during the past week.

Beryl was copying papers at a desk near the bay-window. Her presence in the room was very pleasant to the earl. He had been watching her while she wrote. Now the longing to hear her sweet voice, so like the voice of one he had loved and lost, came upon him, and he said:

"I feel better this morning, Mrs. Park. I feel now that I am going to get well. And if I do, it is you, and not the physician, who will have saved my life."

"I, my Lord ?" said Beryl. "It is but little I can do, and but little I have done."

"You have given me my medicines."

Beryl fancied that there was a singular significance in his tones, and gave him a keen, quick glance, but he was looking into the fire, and his face was as expressionless as a mask. She fancied that she had been mistaken, and resumed her task. But her perceptions had not deceived her. There had been a peculiar significance in the earl's tone and manner. When she had begged

him, on the preceding day, to take no medicine whatever in her absence, she had startled him, and aroused within him strange suspicions, which he had since been keen enough to verify. But as yet it was his purpose to keep his discovery to himself.

"Write a note for me to Mr. Sherwald, Mrs. Park, please," said Lord Hawkhurst, presently. "He is my solicitor. Ask him to come to me at his earliest convenience—immediately, in fact."

"Mr. Sherwald called yesterday, and was extremely anxious to see you, my Lord ; but Mrs. Conyers refused him admittance."

Lord Hawkhurst frowned darkly.

"I will see that he is admitted to-day," he said. "Why, I was better yesterday, and wanted to see him. Mrs. Conyers assumes the airs of mistress here quite too early."

Beryl wrote the letter as commanded, and it was dispatched by private messenger. The hall-porter was then summoned to the library, and ordered to admit all visitors during the day who should especially desire to see his lordship.

Mrs. Conyers had come in regularly during the preceding evening and on this morning, to measure out the earl's medicine, and as regularly had left to Beryl the task of administering the dose. It had not been difficult, therefore, for Beryl to effect a secret exchange of goblets and to give to the earl a draught of pure water. The medicine had been regularly thrown away as prepared.

As the hour of twelve approached, the earl lay down upon his couch, drew a lap-robe over him, and was very quiet. It seemed as if he wished to appear more ill than he was. The physician had been in to see him and

reported favorably. Mrs. Conyers had failed to see the doctor, as was her wont, and had therefore not obtained his opinion of the condition of her "dear Lord Hawkhurst."

A little before noon Octavia entered the library.

"How ill he looks, Mrs. Parks," said she, in a low voice. "Has the doctor been here?"

"Yes, madam."

"Why was I not summoned to see him?"

"I don't know, madam," replied Beryl, respectfully. "It is not my duty to summon you. My place is here."

"It won't be here long, let me tell you that," cried Octavia, angrily. "The earl is sinking fast. I do not believe that he will live the day out. This gastric fever is very often fatal, and when disease gets hold of a constitution like his, it is more often fatal than with less robust persons. His lordship must be taken to his bed-room. This is no place for him to die."

"He will not go to his bed-room, madam," said Beryl. "He slept there last night, as usual, but was in the library at daybreak. As long as he remains in this favorite haunt, he finds it easier to persuade himself that he is not dangerously ill. He will not give up and take to his bed."

"The poor dear earl cannot possibly survive this day. He must be taken to his room and put to bed directly."

She moved toward the bell-pull. Lord Hawkhurst opened his eyes. Octavia halted, and, changing her course, returned to him.

"How do you feel now, sir?" she asked, sweetly. "Oh, I have been so distressed about you, my Lord. I did not sleep last night. You should have let Rollyn watch by you during the night, but he said that you

would have no one but your valet. Are you in much pain?"

"No, I am growing better," replied the earl, briefly. "I shall soon be about again."

He flung off the rug that covered him and walked to his easy-chair. There was a great deal of vigor still in that splendid physique, as Octavia marked with a changing color. She had thought him weak unto death, but there was power and elasticity in his ringing tread. He was not bowed by illness, but walked erect and without the support even of the stick he had used upon the previous day. Mrs. Conyers could not understand it.

"It still lacks ten minutes to twelve," she said, with a glance at the clock. "I will go up to my room a moment and return in time to give you your medicine, my Lord."

She glided out of the room.

The green glass goblet stood upon the cabinet ready for use. Its counterpart was hidden within the open cabinet, within easy reach, and similarly empty.

"Shall I not give you your medicine now, my Lord?" asked Beryl.

"No," said the earl. "It is not yet time."

Beryl was tempted to tell him her suspicions, but she believed that he loved and trusted Octavia and would hear nothing to her detriment. Beryl realized that she should have carefully retained the draughts prepared by Octavia, and that she should have submitted them to the inspection of the doctor. She had kept her suspicions to herself for twenty-four hours, not knowing what she ought to do. She felt that she could not communicate them to Lord Hawkhurst, and now resolved to declare them to the physician upon the occasion of his next visit.

Mrs. Conyers was not absent above five minutes. She returned with a flushed countenance and walked directly to the cabinet and began to measure out the medicine. The earl watched her furtively through his half-shut eyes. He was in the shadow and seemed to be dozing.

"The water, please, Mrs. Park," said Octavia, hoarsely.

Beryl brought the carafe, which was, as usual, upon the table.

While the girl was executing her command Octavia drew a tiny phial from her pocket, unstopped it, and dropped its contents swiftly into the goblet. The phial was pushed back into her pocket, the entire movement being too quick even for Beryl to observe it. But the earl saw it.

Octavia dropped in the water and stirred the compound with a tiny glass medicine-spoon. She was so engaged when the door opened, and Conyers and Mr. Callender came in.

The two gentlemen hastened to pay their respects to the earl, who received them with grave courtesy.

"I am very sorry to see you so ill, my Lord," said Mr. Callender. "I trust that you will soon be about again."

"I trust so, too," said Conyers. "But ought you not to be in bed, my Lord? Do allow us to assist you to your own room."

"I prefer to remain here," said the earl, shortly. "I am master here yet, Conyers, and I intend to be until I die!"

"Of course, of course," said Conyers, somewhat nervously. "I don't understand you, my Lord. Did my suggestion offend you?"

The earl did not reply. The uneasiness of Conyers communicated itself to Callender and Octavia.

"Conyers meant well, my dear Lord," said Callender,

deprecatingly. "He is so devotedly attached to you that he ventures to take the liberties with you which your own son might take. You are very ill, very ill, indeed; but if you prefer to remain here your will must be law, even to these devoted young friends of yours."

"Humph!" said Lord Hawkhurst. "Mrs. Park, has no answer come from Sherwald yet? Has the messenger returned?"

Conyers and Callender turned their gaze upon the little seemingly elderly woman. Beryl was in a shadow. She answered, in a voice she endeavored to disguise:

"The messenger has returned, my Lord. Mr. Sherwald had not yet come down to his office, but his clerk will send him here directly he arrives."

Conyers and Callender again exchanged glances of alarm. Even Octavia looked around inquiringly. What could this demand for his lordship's solicitor mean? It certainly boded no good to them.

Conyers glanced significantly at the goblet. Octavia took it up in her hand, but at that moment was heard a stir at the house-door, and steps upon the marble-paved corridor, approaching the library. Octavia set down the goblet instinctively, and turned her face toward the door. It was only a servant who entered, bearing a small silver tray, upon which lay a yellow envelope.

"A telegram for Mrs. Conyers," he said.

Octavia took up the envelope, and the servant departed.

"A telegram?" said Conyers. "From whom can it be?"

Octavia tore it open, and read its contents. Then she sank down in the nearest chair, as if suddenly strengthless.

"What is it?" demanded the earl. "Read it aloud. Is any one ill or dead?"

Conyers strode toward his wife, picked up the fallen document, and scanned it hurriedly. He hesitated a moment, tempted to conceal the contents of the telegram, but Lord Hawkhurst was waiting expectantly, a look of suspicion gathering on his face. Conyers looked at him, gave a glance at the waiting goblet, and then exclaimed:

"It's very singular, but the telegram is dated Liverpool, and purports to be from Octavia's uncle, William Windsor, whom we all believed dead. He says:

"'MRS. OCTAVIA CONYERS: Will arrive in London this evening. Safe passage out. Go to Cragthorpe to-morrow.'

"That is all, except his name. But it can't be possible that it is Octavia's uncle!"

"The telegram reads as if he supposed his niece to be aware of the fact that he still lives," said the earl. "Did you know it, Octavia?"

"I? No, my Lord."

"Do you think this telegram is really from your uncle?"

"It is, my Lord," said Mr. Callender, smoothly. "Windsor is alive. He's been out in Canada for years. I have known for some time that he lived, but I have not told Octavia nor Conyers. My poor niece believed herself owner of Cragthorpe, and I could not bear to tell her that she had no claim there. I know your favorite project of uniting the Windsor estates to those of Hawkhurst, and regret your disappointment, sir, but

such a union would, in any case, be impossible. Windsor is coming home to marry and settle down."

"How long have you known that Windsor is alive?" asked the earl.

"I have known it since the last of October, or first of November, my Lord," said Mr. Callender, coolly. "I received the news upon the morning of the day on which you first brought Conyers to Cragthorpe."

The earl's face darkened.

"Why did you not tell me?" he asked. "It would have made no difference in my regard for my old friend's daughter, and it would have been only honorable to have told me. You hurried up Conyers's marriage with your niece, did you not? I remember you were present at the wedding. You were in haste to have them married before Windsor should return, or I should discover the truth. Is it not so?"

Mr. Callender smiled and did not deny the charge.

"By Heaven, I have been your dupe throughout!" exclaimed the earl, fiercely. "I believe now that Octavia was a party to your schemes, that she knew also that her uncle was alive, and that, as she knew she was to lose Cragthorpe, she set to work deliberately to secure Hawks' Cliff."

He questioned Octavia if it were not so. She uttered a feeble denial, but her face contradicted her words.

"I have been very cleverly duped," exclaimed the earl, bitterly. "It is not the loss of Cragthorpe I mourn for. I'm glad Windsor is alive; but to know Octavia as a liar, a schemer, a—"

He paused, controlling himself sternly.

"My lord," said Mr. Callender, "Octavia is your old friend's daughter, and the same woman, whether

owner of Cragthorpe or not. She will make a fitting mistress for Hawks' Cliff Castle—"

Lord Hawkhurst's lip curled.

"Yes; a fitting mistress, is she not?" he said, sneeringly. "A fitting wife for Conyers, perhaps, but not the woman to preside over the house where my mother lived. Do not feel too sure, Mr. Callender, that your niece will have the spending of the Hawkhurst income. Mrs. Park, it is singular Sherwald doesn't come. Send a second messenger for him."

Beryl obeyed. She had already found opportunity during the reading of the telegram to secretly exchange the goblets. The one now on the cabinet contained pure water.

Octavia arose and took up the goblet from the cabinet.

"It is past twelve," she said, huskily. "You should have taken your medicine long ago, my Lord. Take it now."

Beryl stepped forward.

"I will give it to him myself," said Octavia, distrustfully. "My Lord, you have condemned me wrongfully. I am not a liar nor a schemer; only an innocent woman who loves her father's old friend, and who would rather have his trust and affection than a thousand Hawks' Cliffs. My Lord, my heart is almost broken under your suspicions of me. Say that you trust me still; say that you believe me honest and true."

She glided to his side, goblet in hand. She paused a moment, waiting for the assurance that he did not make. Then she stooped and pressed a Judas kiss on his forehead, and uttered a half-stifled sob or two, and meekly presented the draught.

He took the goblet from her hand, and looked at her with steady, flaming eyes.

She involuntarily retreated a few paces.

"Is it safe for me to drink this?" asked the earl, holding the glass up toward the light.

"Safe!" stammered Octavia, turning pale. "The doctor left it, my Lord. It is the medicine."

"Shall I drink it?" he asked, still with that steady, flaming glance burning her face.

Conyers uttered an exclamation. Callender half arose from his chair. Both were in a state of great excitement, the manifestation of which they could scarcely suppress. But Octavia, paler than before, and with a cruel smile on her treacherous lips, said, calmly:

"Yes, my Lord, drink it."

The earl silently raised the goblet to his lips and drained its contents. The glass fell from his hands to the floor. His head fell back upon his pillow.

Through his half-closed eyes he could see the swift and sudden exultation lighting up Octavia's dark face, as she flew to his side. Conyers and Callender hurried toward him.

"He is dead!" said Octavia.

"I knew he'd go off suddenly at last," said Conyers.

"He—he is not dead!" said Callender, in a tone of surprise.

The earl looked up into the three faces bending over him and smiled oddly.

"Do you feel better, my dear Lord?" questioned Octavia. "Do you know us? You are dying—"

"I think not," said Lord Hawkhurst, coolly, his odd smile deepening. "Be kind enough to stand back. I am feeling better."

"Better!" cried Octavia.

"Better!" ejaculated Conyers and Callender together.

Octavia darted a questioning glance at her uncle. He looked surprised, even bewildered.

"Are you not in pain, dear Lord Hawkhurst?" asked Mr. Callender.

"None, whatever. I am getting well, I think. If I were not a trifle weak I should say that I never felt better in my life—thanks to Mrs. Park."

The conspirators looked at Beryl, at the earl, at each other.

The earl sat upright in his chair, a queer, stern look in his fiery eyes, a mocking smile still on his lips.

"So you thought I was done for?" he said. "By the way, Octavia, did you think I had made my will?"

Octavia could not speak, fear and surprise making her mute, but her looks expressed assent.

"I did make my will, but I destroyed it. Sherwald was to come yesterday with the draught of the new will, giving all my property to Conyers, with the exception of two thousand a year to Noble Desmond. He did come, but you refused him admittance, Octavia. If I were to die now, without a will, Desmond would inherit my property equally with Conyers."

The conspirators looked aghast.

"But I shall not die now," continued the earl, with a scathing look at his three enemies. "I haven't taken your medicines, Octavia, since Mrs. Park came. The little preparation you made for me, a little while since, is in the cabinet yonder, thanks to my silent, honest Mrs. Park. I saw her change the goblets, as she has done ever since she came here. But for her, I should have perished at your hands. Vipers! Serpents! Out of my house, lest I invoke the vengeance of the law upon you!"

He arose, majestic, terrible, and pointed to the door.

Octavia uttered a wild shriek, and fell on her knees. Conyers and Callender recoiled, and stood as if transfixed.

For a moment, a silence like that of death reigned. Then. again the closing of the outer door was heard, the tramp of feet sounded in the hall, the door of the library opened, and Mr. Sherwald entered, followed closely by Noble Desmond and Mr. William Star !

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DAWN.

As the three gentlemen came in, Octavia struggled to her feet, and gasping for breath, sank into a chair. Conyers and Callender still stood as if transfixed. The three conspirators could not accept absolute ruin without a struggle. They were overwhelmed by the turn affairs had taken. They seemed too utterly stupified and bewildered to obey Lord Hawkhurst's command, but some vague thought of attempting to retrieve themselves by denials and protestations had already entered their minds.

The earl resumed his seat. Mr. Sherwald, after a rapid, observant glance about the apartment, approached his lordship, with a countenance upon which a sense of relief was depicted.

"I am glad to see you so much better, my Lord,' he said. "I called yesterday and saw Mrs. Conyers, but she would not allow me to come in. She said that you

were at the point of death and quite past attending to business."

Sherwald's dislike to Octavia showed itself plainly in this speech, which was, nevertheless, like all his utterances, literally true.

"Mrs. Conyers has been very officious, but all that is over now. How do you do, Desmond? Glad to see you."

Desmond advanced and shook hands with his august kinsman.

"My Lord, permit me to present to you Mr. Star, of Starwood, Surrey," said Sherwald. "I have brought him here to-day for a purpose which I will explain later."

The earl blanched a little, but greeted Mr. Star politely. A single glance at the grim-faced farmer elicited the fact that the latter had not come to Hawkhurst House with any sinister designs against its owner.

"Be seated, sir," said Lord Hawkhurst. "Sit down, Desmond. I was about to send a messenger for you. Sherwald, did you bring the draught of the new will I ordered drawn up?"

"Yes, my Lord, but—"

"Give it to me."

Sherwald drew a thin leathern envelope from his pocket, and produced from its inclosure the document in question. The earl opened it, and glanced over its contents. Then he laid it on the fire. It blazed up and vanished.

"So perish my intention of making Rollyn Conyers my heir," said the earl, in a loud voice. "He will never inherit one penny of my estates!"

Octavia began to sob violently.

Conyers said not a word.

The earl turned toward Desmond with an eager, questioning face.

"Have you found Mrs. Desmond yet?" he asked.

"No, my Lord," said Desmond, anxiously. "We traced her to a house at Bayswater, but she got away in disguise and eluded us. We have searched everywhere, but are still hopeful. We are sure that we saw her yesterday."

"So late as yesterday?" exclaimed the earl. "I was in hopes that she was found already, but I am sure that she soon must be. Sherwald, no stone must be left unturned in the search for her!"

"None shall be, my lord. Mr. Desmond went down into Surrey and found Mr. Star, who is the uncle of the missing lady, and, although he cannot give us any clew to her possible whereabouts, yet he has joined actively in the search for her, and has rendered us some valuable aid. This morning Desmond's advertisement appeared in the first column of the *Times*, asking for information of Beryl Star. It was by that name she was known in Bayswater. No answer has yet appeared to the advertisement, but it is too soon to look for it. It is very singular how near we have repeatedly come to finding her. Desmond saw her in Wells street. Mrs. Margle encountered her in Piccadilly, and yesterday she was in the Bayswater house when we called there, and we saw her leave the house in disguise."

"It is singular," said the earl. "Oh! if you had only intercepted her."

Beryl was in a far corner of the room, in a chair turned away from the group around the earl. She could hear all, herself unseen. She was very silent now, but her heart fluttered wildly.

"We were all together in Desmond's chambers when

my clerk came around with your message, my Lord," said Sherwald, with a growing and apparent nervousness. "The clerk had waited for my return until he had despaired of my coming, instead of seeking me out promptly. I read your letter and gave it into Desmond's hands. The result of the discovery he made was to hurry us all here together. And now, my Lord, may we ask who penned that letter?"

"My attendant, a gentlewoman, who has waited upon me since yesterday morning, and who has saved my life," declared the earl, emphatically. "These vipers you see here, and who remain when I told them to leave my house, have begun upon me a regular system of poisoning. Nothing else whatever has been the matter with me from the first. This devilish woman, Octavia, prepared the stuff for me to drink, and I drank it unsuspectingly. I should have been stark and stiff in death at this moment if Mrs. Park had not detected the infamous design and completely outwitted Mrs. Conyers."

"Who is Mrs. Park?" asked Sherwald. "Who recommended her to you, my Lord?"

"My housekeeper, Mrs. Dominick."

"How does Mrs. Park look?" asked Desmond, eagerly. "Does she dress in black?"

"Yes, and wears spectacles and a widow's cap."

"Will you summon her, Lord Hawkhurst? asked Desmond, arising, flushed and eager.

"Certainly. She's in the room now. Mrs. Park."

Beryl trembled and looked about for some avenue of flight. There was none. She could not own up to her imposition, and a wild idea came to her of braving out the ordeal that had come upon her. The earl called her more loudly. She arose and came forward, the picture

of an elderly, frightened, subdued little gentlewoman, her false hair banded smoothly away from her small face, her eyes hidden behind her spectacles.

"This is Mrs. Park, the lady to whom I owe my life," said the earl. "Mrs. Park, let me introduce to you Mr. Desmond, my kinsman; Mr. Sherwald, my solicitor, and Mr. Star. Now, gentlemen, what have you to say of Mrs. Park?"

Sherwald looked at his companions.

"I have nothing to say, except to apologize for troubling her," said Mr. Star. "We—I had a fancy that she might be my niece, after all. Mr. Desmond thought he recognized the handwriting as Beryl's. I see that this lady cannot be Beryl, and our latest hope is destroyed."

Mr. Sherwald's countenance expressed his disappointment.

But Noble Desmond stepped forward, radiant and joyful.

"Beryl!" he said softly. "Oh, Beryl, I have found you at last!"

To the profound astonishment of all the spectators the elderly little gentlewoman gave a sharp cry of anguish and retreated before him.

"Did you think you could disguise yourself beyond my recognition, Beryl?" asked Desmond, tenderly. "No; you shall not escape from me. I have got you at last."

He caught her in his arms. She struggled to free herself, and succeeded.

"You have found me out, Noble," she said, her tones full of a keen pain. "It would have been better to let me alone. This disguise is useless now, and I will not retain it."

She took off her widow's cap, wig, spectacles, and wet her handkerchief from the carafe of water upon the table and washed the stain off her face. She stood revealed as Beryl Star, in all her youth, innocence and glorious beauty—Beryl with the sombre eyes so like dusky stars.

The earl stared at her speechlessly.

"Beryl," said Mr. Star, "I ask you to forgive all my cruelty to you. When I heard that you were missing, I feared that I had been the cause of your death. I offer you a home at Starwood, and if you will come to me, I will make you my heir."

"Beryl," said Desmond, eagerly, "oh, come to me! Forget that illusion regarding the existence of your first husband and be my own cherished wife. Beryl, my wife—"

"Wait, Noble!" said Beryl, with a sorrowful smile. "Let me answer Mr. Star first. I thank you, sir, for your kindness, but I can never go to Starwood as one on sufferance."

"But, Beryl, you were not to blame," said Mr. Star. "I have usurped the privileges of the Almighty and visited the sins of the parents on the head of their innocent offspring. I will make amends for my wicked brutality. I will give you my name, adopt you legally, and—"

"Stay!" said the earl. "Is this girl Beryl Star?"

"Yes," said Mr. Star and Desmond, in a breath.

"The daughter of Jenny Star?"

Mr. Star uttered a hesitating affirmative.

"Then she has no need of being adopted by any one," said the earl, standing erect. "This girl is my daughter, and as such I acknowledge her in the presence of you all!"

There was a general exclamation of incredulity.

Lord Hawkhurst held out his arms to Beryl, but she shook her head sorrowfully and would not approach him. And yet she felt the subtle magnetism of his presence and could have flown to him, but for the memory of her mother's fate.

"You have the Hawkhurst pride, I see, Beryl," said the earl. "I know what you have been taught regarding your origin, and I now declare to you that Jenny Star was my lawful wife, and that you are legally and truly my daughter and only child, Lady Beryl Desmond!"

His lordship's words carried conviction with them. The group around stood speechless.

"An explanation is due you, my daughter, and you, also, Mr. Star," said the earl, resuming his seat through sudden weakness. "I became acquainted with Jenny Star when she was governess and companion in the family of Lady Fortescue. Miss Star was called in to play the piano very often, and, indeed, spent most of her evenings in the drawing-room. Notwithstanding her position and lack of birth, she had several admirers above her own rank of life. I had come into my title, was a widower and childless. My first marriage had been one of convenience. I loved Jenny Star with all the ardor of my fierce nature. She loved me. I asked her to marry me and she consented. My mother was living then—a haughty, high-bred lady, who was building great hopes upon a second marriage she was planning for me. Jenny was not versed in society ways, and I formed the idea of molding her to my wishes. I married her secretly, and established a home for her at St. John's Wood. We lived there together a year in perfect happiness. Then Jenny began to importune me

to acknowledge our marriage. Between her and my mother, who was anxious that I should marry a lady she had chosen for me, I grew impatient and ill-tempered. I began to stay away from our villa for days together, not that I loved Jenny less, but that I did not like to be so constantly importuned. We had a terrible quarrel one day—Jenny and I—and I left her, declaring to her that I would never acknowledge her. They were words spoken in the heat of passion, and God knows I did not mean them. My poor Jenny! My lost wife! Have I not been terribly punished for those wild, angry words since?"

He wiped his face, which was working with agitation and wet with a cold sweat.

"I had scarcely left her, when my mother, who had in some way discovered my villa at St. John's Wood, arrived, and had an interview with my wife. My mother assured her that I had repented my folly in taking Jenny to myself, and that I loved a noble lady and desired to marry her. My mother confessed this and much more to me on her death-bed, a year later. I went home late that night, remorseful, and resolved to acknowledge my wife immediately. I went, I say, but I found her gone. Gone, and leaving no trace! Gone, my wife, my loved one! How madly I searched for her! Weeks later, I sent a confidential messenger to Starwood, to learn if she had gone back to her kindred. He brought me word that she was dead, and told me where she was buried. I visited her grave. I would have taken up her body and interred it among those of my own people, but my mother dissuaded me, and it could have done no good. I never knew until very recently that she—my wife—had borne a child. I do not deserve your love, Beryl; I dare not ask it; yet I see your mother's eyes

in yours, and if you were only to forgive me the cruel wrong I did her, I think that my wife in heaven would smile upon us and ratify that forgiveness."

He turned a pleading gaze upon his child.

And Beryl, with a choking sob, flew to his arms.

A little later, Lord Hawkhurst said, unsteadily :

"And so, Beryl, you are Desmond's wife? He is a noble fellow. Dismiss your illusions, and put your hand in his like a loving wife. Desmond !"

Beryl drew back from her father's embrace, her brightness overshadowed.

"It was no illusion about my first husband." she said. "Papa—Noble—have you not guessed the truth? There stands the man I married in Geneva last August —the man I married as Dane Conyers—the man who had so nearly wrecked my life ! And he is my husband still."

Conyers smiled after a ghastly fashion.

"Yes," he said, "I am her husband."

"*He ?*" cried the earl. "It is Conyers ! But it will be easy to procure a divorce. We will see to it at once."

"But what is Octavia, if the Lady Beryl is Conyers's wife?" asked Callender. "She has lost Cragthorpe, lost husband—everything."

"It's all up !" said Conyers, crossing the floor with a graceful step and laughing mirthlessly. "The divorce will be easy to procure, as Lord Hawkhurst says. Octavia has lost her fortune. I am likely to be arrested for bigamy. It's a bad ending for a life that began as fair as mine."

He went to the cabinet and took out the goblet with the poisoned draught.

"I drink to your healths, all of you," he cried. "My

Lady Beryl, permit me to wish you happiness in your second marriage. I was not all bad ; I have loved you from first to last ; I love you still."

And he lifted the poisoned goblet to his lips and drank the draught that had been intended for the earl.

His movement had been too quick for those who would have intercepted him. He dropped the glass and fell to the floor—dead ! The fragrance of bitter almonds on his lips told what agent had been employed to dissolve the tie that unites the soul to the body.

They buried him among his kindred. Mr. Callender took his niece away from England, and she resumed her maiden name, and lived a life thenceforward whose bitterness only those who have been guilty like her, and balked in all their ambitions, can understand. Loathing her life, yet afraid to die—could her worst enemy have wished her a worse fate ?

Lord Hawkhurst publicly acknowledged his marriage to Jenny Star, and acknowledged also the Lady Beryl Desmond as his daughter and heiress. The remains of ill-fated Jenny were taken up from their unhonored resting-place and reinterred by the side of the proud Lady Hawkhurst who had caused her death.

Mr. Windsor of Cragthorpe took possession of his own, married, and lived happily in the home which Conyers had schemed to win.

Of all the characters whom we have depicted in our true narrative, not one was happier in the acknowledgment of Beryl as the earl's daughter than Mr. Star. His sister's name was cleared. All his grimness disappeared, and the old boyish geniality that had once characterized him bloomed forth anew. His house was opened to his friends, and in time he contracted a desirable marriage, and was greatly blessed. For many years he had not

spoken his sister's name, but now a dozen times each day he finds occasion to mention "my sister, the late Lady Hawkhurst," or "my niece, the Lady Beryl Desmond."

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